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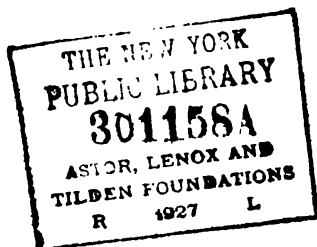
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OF NEW YORK.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHAKSPEARE SOCIETY.

ONE stormy evening in May, the Sycamore Hill Shakspeare Society had met as usual in the library of its president, Mr. Frederick Reese, and its members were discussing the play of "Hamlet," suggesting emendations and offering new readings of even the best known passages. Prince Hamlet was far from finding easy answers to the many riddles with which destiny assailed him whilst he was alive, but his individual uncertainties and perplexities were as simple and deducible as questions in the Rule of Three compared with those which his appeals to the universe prepared for remote generations. Here was the Sycamore Hill Shakspeare Society, which had been already studying the play for three years, yet was far from having settled the difficulties which the frequent paradoxes and the anti-climaxes of the Prince of Denmark's career present to the really conscientious critic.

This very evening, Mr. Brainerd, an ascetic-looking Anglican priest, had brought forward a text,

hitherto unchallenged, which stimulated a sharp argument and provoked some strong feeling. He asked for a new reading of the final word in that question of Hamlet's mother, —

“What act

That roars so loud and thunders in the index?”

“Index” was to Mr. Brainerd's nice perceptions a poorly contrived word, false in taste, weak in metaphor, obscure in meaning. He was rich in suggestions of what the dissyllable ought to be, and appealed to Dr. Chichester. But the moderate and old-fashioned rector of St. John's, always a stanch conservative, invariably disagreed with the Anglican, and stoutly declared that “index” meant “preamble” and that Shakspeare no doubt knew what he wished to say.

All the others were nevertheless enamored of the idea of helping out the struggling poet at his pinch of need. Mr. Reese suggested that it might be said,

“What act that roars so loud and thunders *to the echo*?”

But Dr. Jasper, the great medical authority at Sycamore Hill, having a lively sense of functional derangement, and no feeling for metre, — being in fact quite indifferent to a foot more or less, — was certain that it ought to be: —

“thunders in thy chest.”

Mr. Brainerd evidently remembered the historic doggerel,

"I hear a lion in the lobby roar,"

for he plausibly maintained that

"What act

That roars so loud and thunders *in the lobby?*"

was not only happy in meaning but correct in rhythm. But Mr. Redmond, although confessing that he found great originality and force in all these corrections, said he had still another to bring forward. He was a modest man, and shrank from imposing his views upon learned Shakspearian scholars like those with whom it was his good fortune to be associated, but, when pressed, he declared that in his opinion the passage might best be rendered,

"Ay me, what act

That roars so loud and thunders *in my ears?*"

No one could doubt that the guilty queen found her son's indictment rather deafening, and even Dr. Chichester made a note of this for future study.

Mr. Reese, who of all the society was the most indefatigable in learned research, had been not a little impatient at such a prolonged debate regarding a point he considered quite unessential. The moment Mr Redmond stopped to draw breath, he claimed attention.

"I consider," he remarked, tapping the table with his pencil, screwing up one eye, and holding his head a little on one side, as his habit was in those rare moments when his powers found free play, "I consider that it has been my fortunate destiny to

make one of the most important and significant discoveries ever made regarding the actual meaning of the play of 'Hamlet.' I predict that it will come home to you all, as it came home to me, with irresistible force. Turn, if you please, to Act II., scene ii., to the place where Polonius asks permission to take leave of the Prince. 'You cannot,' says Hamlet, 'take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal, except my life, except my life, except my life.' Now, in reading this over three days ago, it suddenly occurred to me that this was a singular phrase, 'I would part with nothing so readily except my life.' Pray how is a man to part with his life? What is he without his life? Nothing. What is his life without him? Nothing whatever. One is the indestructible essence of the other,—they are blended, united,—destroy one, you destroy the other! You cannot part with life as you part with a friend at the corner, one going one way and the other the other. He and his life were inseparable, began and ended together. I have a different reading to suggest for that line."

Mr. Reese paused, and waited to see if expectation was intense. He was tender-hearted over his fledglings of fancy, and it hurt him to be met by coldness and incredulity. Accordingly, it flattered him to see that his argument so far had been convincing.

"Pray go on," said Mr. Redmond; "this is most interesting. Now that I think of it, there is something unexplained about that passage. Do let us hear how you would render it."

"The error is a slight one," said Mr. Reese; "there is but a single letter altered from what was, I am certain, the original text, but that one consonant defines the whole situation and puts the whole development of the drama in a new light."

"A single letter," said Dr. Jasper, studying the text, "a consonant. Now I wonder which it is."

"Go on, Reese," said Dr. Chichester. "We are ready to listen to anything."

Mr. Reese liked to coquet a little with his opportunity.

"I am more and more impressed," he remarked, "by the wealth of meaning a man can bring out of Shakspeare. Shakspeare is like an ocean; if you wish to play on the surface, then you find sparkle and foam, color and beams of light. If you desire to pierce the subtle significance of his strange and far-off allusions, there are the unfathomable depths to explore, deeper than plummet can sound, and full of the most wonderful riches."

"True," said Mr. Brainerd, "true. Shakspeare was — there can be no doubt but that he was — an extraordinary man."

"Come, come!" said Dr. Jasper, "we grant all that. We want to hear about your discovery, Reese."

"I was just about to proceed," said Mr. Reese. "Just let me inquire, to begin with, whether you never thought Hamlet's behavior to Ophelia was just a little peculiar? He goes forward and back; loves and curses in a breath. Now, there must have

been some reason for these inconsistencies. I wish you to observe how my reading of his words to Polonius resolves the situation. Here is my emendation: '*You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal, except my wife, except my WIFE, except my WIFE.*'"

"His wife!" repeated Dr. Chichester. "Do you mean that Hamlet was a married man?"

Mr. Reese had leaned back, a little exhausted, but he nodded impressively in reply to this question.

"He means that Hamlet had been secretly married to Ophelia," murmured Mr. Brainerd, breathless. Although a confirmed celibate, the priest still had some youthful sentiment and imagination. "But why should he have wished to get rid of her?"

"I don't wonder at that in the least," said Dr. Jasper. "He showed the regular conjugal feeling — found her a superfluity and a bore while she was alive, but had the true widower-like appreciation of her virtues the moment she was dead and buried."

"I'll tell your wife, doctor; as sure as the world, I'll tell your wife," said the rector.

"Just observe, too," pursued Dr. Jasper, "what Hamlet says about Polonius, 'Those tedious old fools!' Exactly the sort of opinion a man naturally has about his father-in-law."

"Oh, I did not mean — I assure you I did not mean that Hamlet was married to Ophelia!" gasped Mr. Reese, utterly taken aback at this mutilation of his clear and beautiful interpreta-

tion. "I meant that he was married to somebody else, and that that was the reason why he behaved so badly to Ophelia. Of course, I cannot speak from accurate knowledge; my facts are conjectural, but I cannot help thinking that he had made an unhappy and disastrous connection while at college in Wittenberg. His friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, no doubt, were his confidants and the witnesses of the marriage. For, don't you remember that when they come to see him at Elsinore, he remarks to them, 'Man delights not me; no, nor woman neither,' then adds,—jealously conscious that they are well aware that, at one period, he had not been so dead to the enchantments of the fairer sex,—'though by your smiling you seem to say so.'"

"Why, this is wonderful, wonderful!" murmured Mr. Redmond. "It does, indeed, put everything in a new light."

Mr. Reese could not help showing some slight exhilaration at the success of his novel hypothesis.

"I felt certain," he exclaimed, enthusiastically, "that you would see how admirable in its force, its good sense, and its poetical completeness my correction was."

"It's a puzzler, though," said Dr. Jasper. "I don't quite take it all in."

"There is a good deal in it," said Dr. Chichester. "It certainly throws a flood of light on the meaning of the soliloquy."

"Offers a clear elucidation of his views about

suicide," put in Dr. Jasper; "for 'fardels' read 'marriage.'"

"But I have a little error of my own discovery to bring forward, which is in this same scene, Mr. Reese," said Dr. Chichester, for it was characteristic of the Shakspeare Society that each member considered his own suggestions more weighty and luminous than those of other people. "It does sometimes strike me as singular that, in spite of the revisions and the careful editing of Shakspeare's works, there are still entire lines which critics have passed by. Please to turn back a little, — Act II., scene ii., — where Hamlet says, 'For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion,' or a 'god kissing carrion,' as other editions have it, now — for 'good,' or 'god,' I should like to have it read 'fly.' 'For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a *fly* kissing carrion.' Eh, how's that, Jasper? Not only sensible, but scientifically accurate, I should say."

Mr. Reese now called attention to the fact that it was on the verge of ten o'clock; that there was no time for more discussion, but that it was in order to present any fresh matter to be studied up before the next meeting. Mr. Redmond at once asked if he might beg them to consider the propriety of reading "*Faint and scant of breath*," for "fat and scant of breath." There was something opposed to all ideas of a mother's tenderness to have the Queen make such a gross allusion to her son's figure. In fact, it marred the beauty and the dignity of the

scene, if "fat" were allowed to remain. His correction was:—

"He's *faint* and scant of breath. Here, Hamlet,
Take my napkin, rub thy brows."

"Napkin," of course, here meant handkerchief, and the Queen had, no doubt, rubbed cologne or some pungent odor upon it.

Dr. Jasper then put in his request to have the society make a note of one exception and one query of his own. "When Hamlet says:—

" 'Let Hercules himself do what he may,
The cat will mew and dog will have its day,'

'*Day*' is evidently a mistake for '*bay*.' If a dog were to have his day, why, then, the cat, being a nocturnal animal, would have had night apportioned to her. But no, the cat will mew, and the dog will bark, only, bark not suiting the exigencies of the rhyme, the word bay was put instead of bark, 'bay' meaning almost the identical thing, 'A dog bays at the moon,' for example."

The members nodded at each other, and the doctor went on to say that at the next meeting he should present some original and, he trusted, forcible suggestions on the subject of Hamlet's meaning when he asked:—

"Woo't drink up eisel? eat a crocodile?"

The clock at this instant struck ten, and a change of countenance, indicating not exactly relief, but some fresh and delicious expectation, became visible

on the faces of all the group. The last stroke of the bell-hammer had hardly ceased its vibration before the door opened, and Peter, the chief domestic functionary at the Reese house, made his appearance. He had no need to be instructed concerning his duties, but at once proceeded to gather up the various editions of Shakspeare which encumbered the oblong table, then to place upon it decanters, glasses, and two bottles.

It had always been observed by the wives and daughters of the members of the "Sycamore Hill Shakspeare Society" that there was an extraordinary degree of consistent enthusiasm about the way these meetings were kept up month after month, year after year. Other engagements might be denied, thrown over, derided, but on these appointed Thursdays each man's eyes brightened, and nothing could keep him at home. There was, too, an unusual sprightliness in all allusions to the meetings. "Haven't seen you since the 'Shakspeare Society,'" the members would say to each other; and invariably a genial smile of reminiscence softened the grimmest countenance at the mention. Facts like these could not pass unnoticed. Feminine suspicions were abroad that something besides the dramatic works of Shakspeare contributed to the evening's entertainment. The most pointed questioning, however, elicited only a careless answer that there might be a cigar after the meeting was over, but that a cigar was neither here nor there; the play was the thing.

"Thank you, Peter," Mr. Reese said, when a plate of biscuits and another of sandwiches were added to the decanters and the two bottles of Burgundy. "That will do. We are very comfortable."

"Very comfortable indeed," said Dr. Chichester. "I'm much obliged to you, Peter."

Peter grinned and withdrew. He was a decorous English servant, and it was no habit of his to grin in reply to his betters; but he enjoyed the approbation of the Shakspearians — in fact, he had taken the society under his protection. No person in that house gave orders save Mrs. Reese herself, and it was far from being that lady's wish that the members of her husband's club should be treated to her choicest Madeira and Burgundy; a cheap and mild sherry was what she directed her butler to decant for common hospitalities. Most things went on in her household more or less according to her somewhat imperious mandates; but the keys of the wine-cellar were in Peter's possession, and almost his sole opportunity of circumventing his mistress was offered by the meeting of the Shakspeare Society. It was a rankling thought to Mrs. Reese, and gave point to some of her most poignant speeches; that she was no wiser than any other woman on the Hill as to what went on in her husband's library on those evenings. She knew that something in the way of wine was brought forth on these occasions. Just to find out what it was, she had once stolen surreptitiously into Peter's pantry and ventured to taste, by way of experiment, the dregs in the bottom of a glass apparently left

unfinished by one of the Shakspearians. Peter had, in fact, intended that his mistress should taste this liquid, that in future she should leave his sacred precinct uninvaded. It took Mrs. Reese some hours to recover from the effects of that fatal sip.

No such results followed the glasses of Madeira and Burgundy poured forth to-night. Mr. Reese's habits were abstemious, a thimbleful of wine went to his head, and, in his present state of elation over his brilliant suggestion of the true meaning of Hamlet's troubles, he became mildly hilarious. Mr. Reese was not a happy man, and these meetings of the Shakspeare Society offered him almost the only compensation in his depressed and nerveless existence. Sitting at the head of the library table, passing the bottle and discoursing on Shakspeare, he had a feeling of being in his own house and entertaining his friends as other men did. His wife was a rich woman, but he had little to call his own in the world, he often told himself drearily; yet this room he might at least venture to claim. It contained his folio Shakspeare, his whole Shakspeare library, his books, casts, busts, pictures of Shakspeare, and photographs of Stratford-on-Avon. In the drawers of his desk were his own priceless unpublished notes on the play of Hamlet, which it was the one ambition of his life to see printed on vellum and bound in tree calf. Mr. Reese had been a handsome man in his day, but had shrunk a little under the withering touch of time, and his well cut features had taken on an habitual look of sombre discontent. But he

now cast off care, and smiled; his youthful jaunty air came back; he summoned to his tongue all the bright things he had said to himself in solitary hours and left unuttered in the presence of his wife and daughter. He became indifferent to the fact that he was a mere spoke in the wheel of his wife's mechanism, and he looked, spoke, and almost felt once more like an individual being. Black care was waiting for him, however, and sprang upon his shoulders at a speech of Dr. Jasper's.

"So you are all going to Europe, Reese," the doctor remarked.

Mr. Reese was a delicate-looking man; his dark eyes were large and melancholy, his hair fine and scant, and he held his head a little on one side. He seemed constitutionally timid, and it at once became evident that Dr. Jasper's speech had considerably startled him.

"Going to Europe? Do you mean me? Did anybody say I was going to Europe?" he demanded.

"Mrs. Reese said 'We are going,' and I took it for granted her 'we' included you, although I know the royal way of speaking which our wives have," said the doctor, dryly. It had been evident all the evening that Dr. Jasper was in an impatient and half irritable mood—but then he was never patient or amiable when he had a grievance, was disturbed about a case, or thought the world was going wrong. He tried to sympathize with other people, so relied on not being misunderstood by his friends and neighbors. "What occurred was this," he went on, still

addressing Mr. Reese, "I said to your wife that Bertie was coming back at once, — would be here in less than a week; she replied, 'We are not likely to be here to welcome him; we are on the point of sailing for Europe.'"

Mr. Reese seemed bewildered, and looked at the doctor helplessly. "I wonder if she meant me," he said, plaintively.

"So Bertie is coming home," said Dr. Chichester, trying to change the subject, which had taken away all the comfort and peace of mind of their host. "Only last week you told me he would stay another six months."

"I told him he might," said the doctor. "He wanted to go to Russia, and I approved of the plan, but he had been spending money too freely, and I took the liberty of remarking in my last letter that he might as well gather up his wits a little and reflect that he was not the son of an English peer whose family motto was *noblesse oblige*, but of a poor country doctor who picked up a few half-dollars a week by driving about in a rickety chaise questioning old women about their rheumatism and looking down children's throats."

The men all laughed, except Mr. Reese, who appeared as if laughter and he would never meet again.

"His mother put in a note begging her dear boy to be a trifle more economical," the doctor went on, growing each moment a little more whimsical and a little more vehement, "and Bertie vouchsafed a

reply to her communication, but not a word did he reply to mine. He said he was not willing to encourage his father's parsimony, and rather than stay in Europe on such terms as I proposed, he preferred to come home. His going abroad at all, he remarked, was at my suggestion, and his return was at my option. What he hated, he declared, was my endless discussion of sordid practical considerations, — it robbed my correspondence of all value and all charm. He added that he was already on his way to Liverpool to sail for New York, and that he would be much obliged if I would at once lodge five hundred dollars at Drexel's to his account, as he should leave a few orders with his tailor as he came through London, and had a bill to pay there besides."

Dr. Jasper, having poured out this recital with angry and excited emphasis, looked at the rector, who burst into a fit of laughter, which the doctor joined with a gruff "Ha, ha," then got up and began to stamp about the room. "Did you ever hear anything like it in your life?" he proceeded. "I've got two boys, and ever since they were born I've tried to be fair with them, leave them uncramped by all save nature's laws, and to regard their deviations from common-sense with a large and disinterested patience. But it's no good. I don't understand them; they are beyond me." He shook his head mournfully, sat down and poured out a fresh glass of Madeira. "Let me see," said he, looking across at Mr. Redmond, "you've got four daughters, Reese

has one; Dr. Chichester, how many children have you?"

"Eleven, I believe, or is it ten?"

"You have no children, Brainerd," said the doctor, with a sigh, looking at the young Anglican priest.

"I am not married," answered Brainerd, frigidly, finding such allusions quite pointless and out of taste, when his views on the subject of celibacy were well known.

"Never marry," said Dr. Jasper. "Every man who begets children repeats the story of Frankenstein. He summons into existence creatures endowed with appetites, capacities, and instincts over which he has no control, and it is the ceaseless endeavor of these monsters to punish the author of their being."

"Come, come, Jasper," said Dr. Chichester, "I've got a dozen — and, I give you my word, not a Frankenstein among them all."

"Your eldest is a girl. Wait till your boys grow up. I have no girls. I'm thankful to say I have never experimented in the female problem."

"I have," said Mr. Redmond, pointedly; "I have four daughters." The others regarded Mr. Redmond attentively. He was a handsome, smooth-faced man, who rarely committed himself to any personal allusion. "I think," said he, "that you are a little — just a little — extreme, Dr. Jasper; but I will say this: that — that my four girls constantly take me by surprise."

"Fine girls — noble girls — chuck full of ideas,"

said the tolerant rector. "Allow me to say, too, Redmond, that they are very handsome girls."

"I admit all that. They are fine girls, and brimful of ideas! But what takes me all aback is the peculiar character of their ideas. They did not inherit them. How could they have got hold of them?"

"Hang it!" said Dr. Jasper, "that is just what I say about Bertie. He's my own son and his mother's. He's what I made him. He only knows what I taught him or allowed him to be taught. He never wore a suit of clothes I didn't pay for. He has hardly eaten a meal I haven't been at the expense of. Yet any one might suppose from his fine critical airs of superiority, and his clear convictions of the importance of his own individuality, that, instead of being an accidental and altogether unnecessary adjunct to my existence, he contrived himself independently, and that, at great labor and expense, I am compelled to keep him going."

"You spoiled both your boys," said Dr. Chichester. "If you want sensible, well balanced children, have a dozen or so on a small income. Teach them to be thankful when there is enough milk and porridge to go round, and clothes to keep them warm. Pay no regard to their individual caprices; make them all conform to a fair average standard. Then when they grow up they stand a good chance of being happy themselves, and a comfort to you."

"I tried to bring my children up in the best way," said Mr. Redmond. "My wife died when Lorraine was born, so I have only four. I wanted all the

girls to resemble their mother, and would have trained them into her likeness if I could. She was my exact ideal—prompt, punctual, matter-of-fact; did everything without fuss; seemed always at leisure; habitually sat in the same place, ready to listen to my remarks and make a sensible reply. Her dress was invariably neat, trim, well buttoned up. A garment loose at the waist is my abhorrence, and she never wore one. Her hair was always compact, smooth, and shining. Now, although there has not been a day in the lives of my girls when I have not pointed out these admirable maternal traits, it is amazing to see what different ideas they have. They never choose a gown to suit me; they invariably have something unlike other people's. There is always some redundancy, some superfluity, something trailing or flapping, hanging loose, forever under foot or catching in places, upsetting furniture, dipping into the dust. Their hair is never what their mother used to call 'done up.' It floats about their heads and shoulders like an aureole. They are invariably late to breakfast; then rush in just as I am through, dishevelled, untidy, ungirdled. When I try to impose my ideas upon them, they declare I have no sense of the picturesque. I confess I do not want the woman who sits opposite me at table to be picturesque. I want her to look neat and modest, without any slopping over."

"Handsomest women on the Hill," declared Dr. Chichester. "You ought to be proud as a peacock of every one of them."

"I am; I assure you I am. This is mere preamble. What I was coming to was, the point that my four daughters seem to be set up with a mental equipment which has no relation to either their mother's or mine. Now, there is Nora; she is a Spiritualist. Madeline has taken a doctor's degree, and wants to set up as a physician. Agnes has joined a sisterhood, and Lorraine intends to be a college professor."

"They've got the impress of the age," said Dr. Chichester. "It's not deep, and they will grow older and wiser and forget it. You did not give them enough to do. Women need to be kept at work. Everywhere in nature, except among the highest classes of civilized people, women are the chief workers. My Polly has no ideas, I assure you. There you have the natural woman."

"Polly is simply perfect. I wish my girls were more like her."

"You don't appreciate your little Lorraine, Redmond," said Dr. Jasper. "She's a clear-cut crystal."

"She wants to be a college professor," answered Mr. Redmond, as if that settled the subject about the flawless crystal.

"Reese holds his tongue," said Dr. Jasper. "He knows that if anywhere there is a princess in her own right, it is his daughter Miriam."

"I have always considered Miriam exclusively her mother's daughter," Mr. Reese was obliged to answer, still looking as if he had never known a joy. "I had nothing to do with her bringing-up. Mrs.

Reese had her own ideas on that subject, as on all others."

"I hope Bertie will not come back sulky and out of humor," observed Dr. Chichester to Dr. Jasper.

"He's not angry. He is much too fine a fellow to be angry. I am angry, though,—I am furious. It makes me hot all over to think of his high tone! What am I to do?—what am I to say when he comes? He is dignified; I shrivel up with a sense of my sordid parsimony. He is large,—he is magnanimous; I am mean!" It was evident, however, that the doctor's wrath was subsiding. "He gives me no chance to repent," he continued. "He says that by the time we read the letter he shall be half way across the Atlantic."

"You can't say he gives you no chance to make amends. There's that five hundred dollars for his tailor."

"I told you he was magnanimous. He also asked his mother to have a comfortable room ready for his friend, Paul Forbes, who is returning to this country, and whom he has invited to spend a few weeks with him."

"Paul Forbes, who is he?"

"Bertie has written about him for six months. I'm not sure whether he's a literary fellow or an artist. I seem to have both ideas connected with him."

It was well on towards midnight and the Shakespeare Society broke up. Mr. Reese, left alone in his library with his fire and lights and folio Shakspeare,

seemed excessively nervous and perturbed; he paced the room to and fro, stopping occasionally to listen for some sound in the house. He expected Peter to come in, and the moments seemed endless before that functionary appeared with a glass of water on a salver.

"Peter," said Mr. Reese, facing round and looking at the man, with his head a little on one side and his forefinger raised in caution, "Peter, have you heard Madam say anything about going to Europe this summer?"

"She was a speakin' of it to-day, sir, to Miss Miriam, when I served coffee."

"Ah," said Mr. Reese, "ah!" He drew himself up, frowned, and stared fixedly at the butler, who had a mild, homely, and utterly expressionless face, and gazed back with the unblinking gaze of a wooden image.

"Peter," pursued Mr. Reese, his voice sunk to a whisper, "did you hear anything about my going with her?"

"No, sir; she never mentioned you. She was only a-sayin' to Miss Miriam that she wished they could arrange to go right off."

"I wish you would find out, Peter, if Madam has any idea of my going with her. I should very much like to know, Peter, if she has any thought of asking me to go with her."

"I'll try, sir," Peter returned; "but she do like to keep a secret — Madam do."

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT LADY.

It may be thought that Mr. Reese trusted a good deal to Peter's discretion ; but, then, Mrs. Reese's ways were mysterious, and past finding out by her husband, and he had been forced to secure the services of the only sure ally he could command. It is not easy for a man with a small income to contend with the vagaries of a rich and imperious wife, who holds the family purse-strings and opens or draws them according to her capricious will. The mention of the European scheme had plunged Mr. Reese into profound dejection. He lay awake all night, after the meeting of the Shakspeare Society, weighing the probabilities of his being included in the party. No past experience could be of service at this crisis. More than once he had been informed that Mrs. Reese and Miriam were on the eve of a five months' absence, and they had departed on the morrow and left him alone with a houseful of servants who had orders to put everything into brown holland and lock up the chief rooms. But then again, it had been Mrs. Reese's caprice to hand her husband on a Thursday his ticket for the Saturday's Cunarder, telling him that his portmanteaux must be ready the next morn-

ing by ten o'clock. What present disposition concerning him was in his wife's mind was mere matter of conjecture. Sometimes it had been against his will that he had been torn from his beloved studies, but, just at this time he was anxious to bid for a copy of the first folio more perfect than his own which had belonged to the library of a great Shakspearian scholar. Thus he wished, above all things, to be in London by the middle of June.

Frederick Reese had published a book of poems at the age of twenty-five, towards which all the world, except Miss Belinda Vanderbeck, had turned a cold glance. She was a lady of thirty-five, of good connections but poor, and of waning beauty, and, grateful for her sympathy and comprehension, the young poet had married her. Two years after the birth of their one child, Belinda unexpectedly inherited a fortune. Her brother died in Minneapolis, leaving a great, undeveloped estate in mines and timberlands, and this was secured to his sister, his only heir, but left under the charge of trustees, who were to manage the property, gradually realize it, and insure Belinda's individual control over every cent of her income.

Nothing could have suited Mrs. Reese better than being made independent of her husband. She insisted that he should give up his position at the Custom House, and, would have liked to deprive him even of his own modest patrimony. She wanted him to worship her, to look up to her—she wanted, in fact, to be his earthly providence, and

it was a keen disappointment that he had five or six hundred a year which allowed him to maintain some self-respect, and buy his own clothes, instead of asking her for an allowance. For the past twenty-two years, Mrs. Reese had been waiting for the moment to arrive when her husband should throw himself on her bounty, make a request, offer a petition. He, on the other hand, was all this time struggling to assert his feeble powers against her sovereignty. He felt as if his wife despised him for his lack of means, and he would have starved before he asked a favor. Thus there grew up a sort of estrangement. Mr. Reese's apparent imperturbability, his abstractions, his long silences in her presence, his withdrawal to his solitary enjoyments in his library, heaped bitterness on the disappointments of the great lady's heart. She was still in love with her husband, and what she ardently desired was an exhibition of romantic devotion from him.

Although she was romantic, Mrs. Reese was at the same time a very ambitious woman socially. She had tried one city after another, but, even with wealth like hers, she had found too many competitors, and did not feel herself clever enough to carry her point against rivals well intrenched, with large family connections, wit, and knowledge of the world. She could be royally generous at times, but she disliked reckless extravagance, and sometimes, after setting out in a course likely to distinguish her in New York or Newport, she had all at once grown timid, lost heart, and thrown up the game she might have

won. Ill at ease in the brilliant centres she had once hoped to govern, she had, ten years before our story opens, bought an estate at Sycamore Hill, a breezy region within the limits of Philadelphia. The house had been built and the grounds laid out by a rich man who wished to reproduce an Italian palazzo he had once lived in, near Albano. The result was a great structure in buff stone and stucco, with an imposing, many-windowed façade, stately pillars, and profuse ornamentation. The great court was set about with all sorts of tropical-leaved plants; a fountain played and murmured, and its incessant spray took on prismatic tints in the sunshine. Statues glimmered beckoning through the turns and windings of the shrubberies. At the left of the house was the clock-tower, on the right stretched the great graperies, forcing-houses, and conservatories. The estate had originally belonged to one of the followers of Pastorius, and had been preserved as unbroken woodland for one hundred and fifty years. Some acres of forest still remained, and stretched away to the west, swelling upwards from the foot of the gardens and lawns. A brook had its course down the slope, and had been forced into turnings and meanderings, into cascades and shadowy pools, and at last was checked in its outflow to fill the beds of a chain of ponds crossed by rustic bridges, and adorned with picturesque arbors. This estate admirably suited Mrs. Reese's tastes. Nobody she knew in this country had a place resembling it. It had cost a high figure, to begin with, and was an enormously expensive

possession to keep up. She could grow her own pines and grapes and figs, and pay for each about five times as much as would be asked in the markets. There was a picturesque farm-house beyond the gardens, pretty enough for a Trianon, where the most expensive butter could be made. Altogether, it was at last quite possible for Mrs. Reese to exhaust a large proportion of her income in current expenses. She felt the responsibilities of landed property; she imported English servants, and retained them by paying incredible wages. She had a fixed system, gave orders in a grand way, insisted on a clock-work regularity, and until she got everything in working order was in the best of humors, but then was surprised to find how dull it was,—how objectless were her days. She invited troops of people to visit her, but found almost everybody rude, ungrateful, or hypocritical. Nobody seemed to appreciate his unique good-fortune in being admitted to her magnificence; nobody changed the tedium of life into enjoyment for her. All the rest of the world seemed to find life a holiday; but Mrs. Reese nowhere, nohow attained the happiness which seemed her due. It filled her with a sort of rage that, in spite of her wealth, she got little or nothing out of her existence; with all the money she had at her disposal, she yet was powerless to have the good times which came freely to her neighbors, who made excursions to Europe, entertained their friends, and married their daughters on an income less than a tenth part of hers. The thing she craved was not only to do

as much as others, but to multiply the sum of it by three. What made her more wretched than any other failure in her competitions in life, was to hear of some young woman's making a brilliant marriage. She wanted not only more servants, thicker rugs and more costly pictures than other people, but a more successful daughter. Now, Miss Miriam Reese was at this time just twenty-four years of age, and it was her habit to allude to herself, particularly in her mother's hearing, as a failure,—a champion failure.

It was the sinister phrase not only of Mr. Reese but of society in general that Miriam was her mother's daughter. Of this the reader is to be the judge. The more youthful intellect must have been intensely individual and self-sustained not to be colored by the elder. At the earliest age, it had been impressed upon Miriam's mind that she could have twice as much of everything as her playmates had. She soon defined her ambitions, however, and what appeared desirable to her was to have what no one else could possess. She wanted nothing which could belong to any one else. She made few mistakes, and never repeated one. By the time she was thirteen years old, she had a habit of self-restraint which gave her an air at times of being in torture. She felt pent-up, pined for a friend, sought one constantly, but insisted upon testing any new acquaintance by loading her with presents. If the child showed pleasure at the gifts, Miriam turned cold at once, but ingratitude to her benefactions suited her no better.

If she was suspicious of gratitude, she despised ingratitude. Her intellect was keen, and she mastered with ease whatever she undertook. She excelled in modern languages, having had nurses and governesses of all nationalities from her cradle. She liked natural science, and had a distinct aptitude for all which she could analyze and classify. She even attempted to make a collection of birds, and, being a good shot, killed and stuffed a dozen with her own hands. Having overcome a strong repugnance before she could do this, she had a nervous fever in consequence, and for a long time afterwards was thrown into a state of painful emotion at the sight or song of certain birds. Her passion was for music; she was a fair pianist and practised the violin in private. When she was seventeen, she was taken to Europe; and it was generally known that Mrs. Reese had said that if her daughter should marry a man of rank, she would have a half-million for her *dot*. When Miriam was twenty-two, her engagement was announced to Lord Wedderbourne, the eldest son of the Marquis of Penrhyn. Six weeks before the marriage was to have taken place, it was broken off by the young lady. The Reeses came home and ever since had been living quietly at Sycamore Hill. Mrs. Reese had tried to amuse herself as best she might. She had refurnished her house, added a picture-gallery, and built new stables; but she had had a very dull time, and had been as easy to live with as an intermittent earthquake. She was indignant with her husband for his lack of sympathy, his reserved and callous

demeanor, and with her daughter for her reckless throwing away of her youthful advantages. She was jealous of Mr. Reese's Shakspearian studies, and of the interest Miriam seemed to feel in trivial and unimportant people and things. The least Mrs. Reese could do was to retaliate by silence, by mystery. She withheld all her plans from her husband and daughter: she would send out invitations for a dinner or garden-party without a word to them; then, at the last moment, ask, with asperity, if they were dressed and ready to receive their friends. On two occasions she had treated her butler with no more consideration than she treated her husband and her daughter; but, after these two experiments, she thought it better to take him into her confidence, and entertained a wholesome dread of Peter's silent but ingenious wrath. A dinner with all the dishes glacés which should have been hot, hot which should have been cold, the courses broken up and out of order, the *épergnes* dusty, the wine undecanted, was an experience which tried the great lady at her tenderest point, for her chief object in entertaining her neighbors was to spoil their peace of mind by a contemplation of her superior good-fortune. Thus she usually consulted Peter nowadays, and Peter kept his master informed concerning his wife's plans. About this journey to Europe, however, it was difficult to gather any distinct facts; for none existed. Mrs. Reese wished to go, but found her daughter not only indifferent but unwilling. In fact, Miriam, nowadays, was beginning to inspire some awe in her

mother's mind. Month by month she grew less dependent and less pliant, and in any encounter of wills there could be little doubt who should eventually conquer. Mrs. Reese liked to say, "*My* house, *my* horses, *my* servants." About a year before, on one occasion, Miriam had happened to make an observation concerning "her" horse.

"*Your* horse?" said Mrs. Reese, with magnificent emphasis; "*my* horse, I believe."

"Very well!" said Miriam, "*Your* horse be it!" But from that day she neither rode nor drove until her mother inquired why it was that she only went out on foot.

"I have no horses, no carriages," responded Miriam. "I do not choose to use other people's things."

This carried force; and Miriam gradually had horses, vehicles, all the possessions she might crave for her own, except money. Mrs. Reese, so far, had no intention of repeating the follies of King Lear. It had not yet occurred to Miriam that it was desirable to have money. She had been everywhere and done everything, and nowadays it was a relief to go nowhere and to do nothing. She felt keenly enough that the life she endured was not the best in the world, nor what might have seemed to be her due. Still, she liked it better than going about, suffering humiliations, vexations, and, above all, emotions. Fashionable life had never been congenial to her; her mother was always suspecting slights, nursing grievances, declaring hostilities, and

Miriam herself had not the habit of living easily with all kinds of people. She was too scornful and intolerant to be a belle among undergraduates and dancing-men, and was too old nowadays to experience again any thrill of pleasure at balls and parties. Still, she was not disenchanted, nor disillusionized, nor had she ever, so far, been in love. She declared she should never marry, yet at the same moment felt that such a declaration meant only that she despaired of ever being able to believe in anybody enough to marry. At present, however, she did not vex herself about the future. She lived in the moment, doing with a certain attempt at excellence whatever she had to do, and actually trying, with some earnestness, to correct some of her faults — for she had nowadays two friends who told her of her faults. In person, Miriam was variable in attractiveness; she was by turns just a tall, elegant woman, with a sallow face which gave evidences of a reckless temper, and a brilliant, beautiful creature who flashed upon you a glance which startled and roused, and a smile which caressed. In withholding the richest traits of her beauty, she was not governed by her will or by her coquetry. When she perhaps might wish most to please, she was cold and rayless; then, without logic or reason, all at once she opened like a flower to life and color, warmth and charm. If she were radiant, her beauty gave her mother a pang. "It is all wasted," she would say to herself; "there is nobody to see her here — nobody she can marry." Then, when she looked dull and color-

less, the great lady mourned as well: "She is growing old,—never will have her youth again,—has thrown all her chances away."

In fact, Mrs. Reese was both impatient with and indignant at her daughter. "It is the least you can do for me," she was saying to Miriam one afternoon in May, "to go to Europe the 1st of June. The time was when I had only to telegraph to New York for state-rooms, and then tell you we were to start next day. Now —"

"Now, I no longer want to go to Europe," said Miriam; "and I am grown too tall to be carried off against my will."

"You do not care about my wishes. Nobody cares about my wishes," said Mrs. Reese, violently.

"But then you have so many wishes, mother. You want to go to Europe, and you want me to marry a man of distinction. You want a new wing to the house, so that you may have a circular room and an octagonal room. You want a scarlet cockatoo with azure wings; you want a Japanese pug with four puppies. You want to be admitted to the meetings of the Shakspeare Society; you want to converse with Nora Redmond's spirits. There are no things in heaven or earth undreamt of in your philosophy. I simply cannot keep up with you. I do not want to go to Europe. I do not want to marry a man of distinction. I am sorry for you, mother. You ought to have had a large family of daughters to carry out your plans and reward your ambitions."

"How should you like four or five handsome young women in the house on equal terms with you?"

"Oh, I am glad I have no brothers or sisters. Even with you and father I am always seeing my own image in a distorted mirror, as it were, — one feature elongated, another flattened out and half obliterated. I should not like to live with a household of people made out of the same material as myself, each possessing in a greater or less degree my own ideas, instincts, feelings, and passions."

"You are your father's daughter!"

Laughed Miriam, "Both parents disown me. Father says I am my mother's daughter."

"You look a little like me," Mrs. Reese observed, "that is, when you look your best. But you are peculiar. Now, I was never peculiar. You are reserved, and I am the most open and candid person in the world. I carry my heart on my sleeve. Alas! daws peck at it! But there is your father, always silent, self-contained — as far apart from me as if we lived on separate planets. One would think that ordinary gratitude would induce him to treat me with affection and consideration. What position would he have to-day except for me? He would still be toiling away at the Custom-House, on the merest stipend. But he never makes the least allusion to his good-fortune in being my husband! All he cares for is that Shakspeare Society, — he is bound up in that, heart and soul. It really seems to me, Miriam, on the evenings when those men meet here,

that I shall go wild. To think of a woman's being compelled to endure sitting night after night within a few feet of a secret conclave, who are carrying on no one knows what, inside closed doors. And then Peter is leagued with them; he has been bought up by your father, I suppose. He pretends to give them the Red Seal Sherry; but I know—I know, just as well as if I saw him decant it, that he brings out quarts of my best Madeira."

Miriam was laughing. She always laughed at her mother when she could. "I do not believe the Shakspeare Society does any great harm," she remarked. "I dare say they have just as dull a time as the rest of us. Don't begrudge them the consolation of a little good Madeira."

"But the secrecy of it! My own house! My own servants! The wine I bought with my own money! And, mark my words, those men do not have a dull time. They are in splendid spirits. Only two nights ago I heard them laugh—they actually shouted. And here I was, all the time, bored to death. It is so dull living here with only a lot of commonplace suburban people to entertain,—people who can make no return,—hardly one of whom has a proper man-servant, to say nothing of a real butler."

"That is hard, I admit," said Miriam. "It certainly is a cogent reason for going to Europe that the Redmonds have only maids-indoors,—the Chichesters have nothing to call servants at all,—and the Jaspers' one man has to divide his energies be-

tween driving the doctor around and waiting on the table."

"Oh, I know you pretend not to mind these things; but I mind them."

"I know you do, — but when you live among grandees, you are made miserable if they surpass and eclipse you. Here at least nobody can hold a candle to you."

Mrs. Reese nodded. She remembered her sufferings in Newport and New York.

"It is quiet and pleasant here," continued Miriam. "I have friends here, — I am less lonely than I should be in Europe. I enjoy Polly Chichester and Lorraine Redmond, after my way."

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Reese, in a tone of exasperation, "that you may lower all your standards, — that you may take up with Edward Jasper."

Miriam flashed upon her mother dangerously — her glance suggested a weapon. Then she looked away.

"I like Edward Jasper very well," she remarked; then added, with an air of disdain, "I shall marry nobody."

"I want you to marry somebody worth having. As to your not marrying at all, it would break my heart."

"And it would break mine to marry a man who cared only for my money," said Miriam, almost fiercely. "And the men who have offered to marry me, so far, have thought only of that. Not one of them loved me — not one — not one. As to going

to Europe, I wonder you mention the idea to me. I hate Europe! Think what associations it has for me!" She paused a moment; then added, in a different tone: "I know you are dissatisfied, mother, and it does seem a pity that, in spite of all your money, you get so little out of life. Perhaps you and father might go to Europe and leave me behind."

"There is no object in that. Besides, he would not wish to go with me; he is so bound up in that club."

Miriam turned the matter over in her mind. She had a sympathy for both her parents, in a way. There was something miserably incomplete and unsatisfactory in their family life. They lived too much within themselves — were under the tyranny of their own egotisms, their own whims. Their life was a mere fragment of what ought to be a symmetrical whole; it was a mockery compared with what their wishes pointed to. She glanced about her at the pictures, all the works of art which enshrined noble and animating ideas, — at the unused books which might feed souls and intellects like a cordial. It was as if they had everything within reach, yet possessed no key to unlock it.

"I suppose it is my fault," Miriam said, aloud.

"What is your fault? — that we do not go to Europe? Certainly it is."

"Not that — but that you do not contrive to get what you want out of life. I will try to think of something, mother. There must be some expedient for making you enjoy things. And if nothing occurs to me, — why then, — then, we will go to Europe."

CHAPTER III.

MR. AND MRS. REESE.

PETER imparted to his master all the facts and probabilities about the European trip which he could glean from the fragmentary allusions of the ladies to their plans, and for the next few days Mr. Reese suffered all the agonies of suspense, and experienced to a bitter degree the tedium of life. He spent his time tramping up and down his library, looking first from one window and then from another, occasionally opening a door and listening stealthily to the movements in his wife's part of the house. When he met Mrs. Reese at meals, he took pains to listen to her conversation, and make such ingratiating rejoinders as he had the wit to contrive. Observing that under this treatment she thawed slightly, and became less abrupt and disjointed in her remarks, it occurred to him that it might be worth his while to summon up the ghost of his old lover-like self, and fascinate her to the degree of making her covet just such a companion for her journey.

Accordingly, one fine afternoon in the middle of May, as Mrs. Reese, with her pug in her arms, came downstairs ready for a drive, she met her husband in

the hall, hat in hand, and to her surprise he inquired deferentially if he might accompany her.

"Just as you please," Mrs. Reese replied, with apparent indifference; but she was conciliated, nevertheless.

Mr. Reese had counted upon being the second person in the carriage, and enjoying the opportunity of sitting by the side of his wife. Much to his chagrin, he was compelled to yield this place to the dog, who showed so ugly a temper at the suggestion of losing the full cushion alongside of his mistress, that Mr. Reese had no choice except to take the back seat. Mr. Reese was constitutionally delicate; under no circumstances did he like the motion of a carriage, but to ride with his back to the horses invariably gave him a headache.

Miriam came trailing down in her riding-habit just as the party in the landau were established, and was agreeably surprised to see her father opposite her mother.

"But how pale you look!" she said, glancing at him, and flicking her whip at the pug, who snapped angrily. "Don't sit on the back seat, father; it always makes you sick."

"Sick? Nonsense!" said Mrs. Reese. "Drive on to the park. You are coming down the Wissahickon road, Mirry?"

"Yes, you can lead; we will follow."

Four horses were curveting and prancing, eager to follow the carriage. Miss Chichester was mounted on one, and Lorraine Redmond on the other. Miriam,

just touching the groom's hand, sprang to her saddle and they were off. Miss Reese never looked better than when on horseback. She was older than either of her companions, and she looked older than she was, from her air of imperiousness and self-restraint. Lorraine Redmond was but twenty, and Miss Chichester a few months younger. Polly Chichester was the beauty of the group, being beautiful to every eye and to every sense—brown eyes, golden hair, an exquisite coloring, and a shape like a youthful Venus. The rarest charm she possessed was, however, a radiance of expression which made her seem more like a glorious child than a woman. Lorraine Redmond was a petite, pretty creature, a good deal like a Dresden shepherdess, with blonde fluffy hair, blue eyes, a saucy nose, and an exceedingly well cut pair of scarlet lips. Miss Reese had taken a fancy to Polly Chichester, and for more than a year had tried by every means in her power to give the girl pleasure; for she was the eldest of eleven motherless children, and, to Miriam's mind, cruelly overworked in their service. The inscrutable nature of the female problem had given Miriam many hours of hard and painful thinking. It seemed to her that not only fate, but nature, had denied woman any chance of happiness, any object of worthy endeavor; and yet Polly was always happy, always full of serenity, and, above all, full of energies and industries. This beautiful girl was, indeed, pitifully ignorant concerning the injustice of her scanty opportunities. She even believed that her fate was an exceptionally for-

fortunate one. To go into town with five dollars to buy herself a new dress was to Polly a blissful experience — something to be looked forward to for weeks, as the munificent reward of any amount of drudgery; to be enjoyed with exquisite zest while it lasted, and, finally, to be lived over in memory, while she cut and made up her purchase, elaborating its frillings and drapings with all the rich results of her glimpse of the fashions at Wanamaker's. Miriam perhaps wished to enlarge Polly's knowledge of the world a little. She knew how to confer benefits which not even Dr. Chichester, jealous of patronage, could resent. She gave the younger children at the rectory the daily use of an old pony carriage and ponies of her own. Polly must drive it, she said, as the ponies were obstinate and self-willed from eating their heads off in the stalls. She fitted up Polly's room with rugs and chintzes, imported a pattern dress to help her in her dressmaking, gave her a new piano, a small, well chosen library, and, above all, insisted that Polly should have a chance to develop her voice by the aid of a good singing-master. To-day, Polly was, as usual, mounted on one of Miriam's horses.

"Are you actually going to Europe?" Polly asked, turning her eyes on Miriam's the moment the party drew rein as they reached the brow of the long hill which descends to the Wissahickon valley. "Everybody says you are going, but I tell them you have not told me so. Do say that it is mere gossip. I cannot bear to think of it."

"I should leave you the horse, and give orders to the man to ride with you every day," Miriam returned, with a peculiar smile.

"I should not ride the horse," declared Polly. "I shall not ride your horse, I say, if you go to Europe, Miriam. So please do not speak and smile in that way."

"It was not nice of you to say that to Polly, Miriam," put in Lorraine Redmond, severely. "She cares for you, and not for your horses. I thought you were getting over that trick of morbid speech. Just the idea of going back to that great false, tawdry world has put you at your worst again."

Miriam glanced at Lorraine and arched her brows. "You thought you had cured me," she said.

"I believed that you were getting over the habit of thinking ignoble things, unkind things, cruel things of people," insisted Lorraine, on each of whose cheeks there burned, the moment she began to speak, a small bright scarlet spot.

"Don't lecture her, Lorraine," said Miss Chichester, laughing, "I dare say she is running off to Europe simply to avoid your perpetual sermonizing. Let us try, instead, to convince her how fascinating we are."

"I like to have Lorraine scold me," said Miriam. "I should enjoy putting her in an actual fury. She is a small person; but a little righteous wrath makes her majestic — almost Juno-like."

"Are you actually going to Europe, Miriam?"

"Actually I don't know. My mother is anxious to

go. If we go, I wish we could take you, Polly. I wonder if that would not be possible? But no, that would never do. What is required is that I shall make a conquest of some prince or potentate, and what chance should I have, with you beside me?"

"No prince or potentate would fall in love with me," said Polly. "That is, they might fall in love a little way, but not enough to carry them to dangerous lengths. Ever so many gentlemen have seemed to admire me, and have been amazingly polite; but there they stop. I tell them that I am the oldest of eleven, and that papa has three thousand a year — and they go and marry somebody else."

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed Lorraine, her voice quivering with indignation, "that you are disappointed when such things happen, — that you care about the attentions of such men. You surely do not wish to assume an attitude which would make it possible for a man to presume to offer himself to you."

"I should like immensely to have an offer," declared Polly. "I should enjoy it enormously. I dare say you would yourself, Lorraine."

"I? I? Do you know me so little as to think that I would lower myself to invite the admiration of any man? I should scorn myself if I did so. Nothing would induce me to marry. I have very different views of life."

"We will see if after you have passed those examinations you don't try your powers of coquetting a little. Miriam, would it not be delightful to see

Lorraine in love? Next to being in love myself, I should best enjoy seeing that small person consumed by an overwhelming passion."

Lorraine was a horse's length ahead of Polly, and now, scarlet with indignation, she stopped short, and faced her animal around, thus blocking the way.

"Bertie Jasper and his friend Mr. Forbes arrive just at the auspicious moment," pursued Polly.

"How can you talk so!" cried Lorraine. "How dare you talk so! It is as if you considered all my deepest beliefs a cheat, all my ambitions a sham. You know I consider nothing in the world so vulgar, so trivial, as falling in love. As for young men, — as for —"

Lorraine would have proceeded to synthesize her impressions of the youth of the opposite sex, but her horse, angry at being impeded by his neighbors, reared on his hind legs and came down with his forelegs on the neck of Miss Chichester's quadruped. There was a momentary interval terrifying enough; then the groom, who luckily happened to be close at hand, dismounting, was quick enough to succeed in disentangling the two animals before either of the girls was thrown.

"You see, Lorraine," remarked Miriam, as they rode on, "that it is not safe to get so wildly excited."

"But Polly teases me so," explained Lorraine, humbly. "She will insist on not taking me seriously. It is as if she thought me incapable of good, honest, disinterested work, without any paltry side-

issues like those with which foolish women dwarf their lives and thwart their usefulness. I'm sure I try to be consistent. I ride, I play tennis, I am fond of out-of-door pursuits; but not from mere love of amusement, but because I understand and try to abide by hygienic laws."

"Oh, dearest, sweetest Lorraine," cried Polly, fondly, "do not take my words as anything except the merest nonsense. I cannot help running over with high spirits. Everything is so beautiful,—the sky, the breeze, the violets along the banks, the dog-wood blossoms lighting up the dim woods,—everything makes one so unutterably and irresistibly happy. Then it is so pleasant to think that Sycamore Hill is going to brighten up a little. Mrs. Jasper says she shall give two or three parties for Bertie and his friend, and that she hopes we will all try to be a little gayer than usual."

"Who is this friend of Bertie Jasper's?" inquired Miriam. "Not that I count on any friend of Bertie's being very interesting."

"At least, he has not lived in Philadelphia all his life. He will introduce new ideas; he is artistic, or literary, — something out of the common."

"Artistic, literary!" repeated Miriam. "What is his name?"

"Mr. Forbes — Mr. Paul Forbes."

"Herbert Jasper must be a most tiresome and conceited young man, from what I hear," said Lorraine.

"Did you never see him?"

"Never. I was always at school when he was at home; you know we have only lived here ten years, Nora says he is ineffably superior, faultlessly dressed, and serene in his convictions of superiority to the rest of the world."

"He used to be a delightful boy, until he got spoiled at Harvard," Polly remarked.

"They all get spoiled there," said Lorraine, with a shake of her blonde frizzle-pate. "No matter what ambition, energy, faith in the worth of life and endeavor they carry in, they are sure to emerge from college with no vestige of their early ideas and beliefs; they have all become agnostics and pessimists."

"Yet you want to go to college yourself—you think all girls ought to go to college."

"It is very different with girls. Women stand on the level of far sweeter, nobler, and loftier ideas than men."

Miriam and Polly exchanged a smile.

"Is she not perfectly delicious?" said Polly. "It is just Tennyson's 'Princess' over again."

While the youthful elixir was thus effervescing in bubble and froth of talk, Mr. and Mrs. Reese were leading the way in the landau along the Wissahickon road, whose forests and thickets bordering it on either hand were lighted up with masses of starry dog-wood bloom.

"Why don't you say something, occasionally," demanded Mrs. Reese of her husband, who was ghastly pale, for his headache had been stimulated

by the brilliance of the hot sunshine, and he was enduring wretched discomfort.

"I remarked only a little while ago," gasped poor Mr. Reese, "that the dog-wood flowers made a sort of Milky Way through the woods, but my remark elicited no response."

"You had said the same thing twice over," replied Mrs. Reese, inflexibly, "and the idea was not your own, to begin with. You are very well aware that Lorraine Redmond had it in a poem."

"Had she? oh, so she had," said Mr. Reese, impassively. "But, after all, who ever says a thing for the first time nowadays? You find everything in Plato or Lucretius. I dare say Lorraine stole her conceit about the Milky Way."

"Did you steal your ideas, — that is, when you used to pretend to have ideas?" inquired Mrs. Reese.

"Very likely."

"I should be ashamed to confess it!" said the lady, with a rising crest.

Mr. Reese smiled a sickly sort of smile, and waved his hand, as if deprecating her scorn.

"Never was a man so changed by marriage as you are," pursued Mrs. Reese. "I used to consider you full of wit, full of resource — above all, abounding in sentiment. I suppose you have forgotten all about the days when you first knew me, — when you used to spend evenings with me, and read me your poems by the hour."

Mr. Reese's humble attitude for the past few days

had not been unnoticed by his wife. She had been moved by the fancy, as he sat opposite to her, in silence, gazing into her face, that he was trying to overpower the dumb devil which possessed him, and address her fervidly and intimately. She studied his face now to detect some tremor of sentiment, but Mr. Reese's features were at this moment hardly capable of expressing anything more than the bitterest woe and discontent.

"Everything then was full of beauty and romance to you," said Mrs. Reese. "You wrote a poem on seeing me in a white dress for the first time."

"Did I?" muttered Mr. Reese, staring blankly at his wife.

"Do you mean to say that every circumstance which happened at that period of your existence has flatly vanished from your memory?"

"Excuse me, Belinda," murmured the poor man, unconsciously borrowing from Shylock and trying to put equal tragic meaning into his voice, "*I am not well.*"

"Any subterfuge to evade, any excuse to deceive. I dare say you consider me mentally very weak, but I am not weak. I am, I assure you, quite deep enough to measure you and your motives. If there be a person in the world whom I understand, it is you. You think that, shut up in your library, every door barred, every key turned against your wife, your secrets are your own, but they are not,—I know them all. Week after week those men come prowling in to what is called your "Shakspeare

Society. — Am I asked! Never! Does any one pay me the least degree of attention as I sit solitary and uncared for in my own house! Not one! Am I consulted even as to the form of entertainment you instruct my butler to prepare for them! Never! Everything is private, hidden, secret, masked, concealed. But all the same, — I know everything — everything. It is that '29 Madeira you drink — I am sure of it, I — what are you doing?" Mrs. Reese suddenly stopped short in her harangue, startled to see her husband put his forefinger in his mouth and bite it with all his might.

"What are you doing?" she exclaimed.

"I thought it might make me feel better," said Mr. Reese. "The motion of the carriage —"

"Nonsense, there's not the least motion in this carriage. I had it built for me in London, and it was brought over at the most frightful expense."

Mr. Reese was silent. Miserable regrets and futile longings filled his mind. Why had he quitted his beloved retirement, and subjected himself to this ordeal of prolonged, hopeless wretchedness? What absurd ambition had possessed him? What vain expectation of making himself so agreeable that his wife would invite him to go to Europe? He had kept his glassy eyes fixed upon her for some time, feeling that safety lay in concentration of vision upon some particular object. She was a fine-looking woman for her years. Her once dark hair had been bleached by the process of time or art, to the whiteness of snow, and set off her black eyes and

olive skin. She was no displeasing object. But her head was crowned by a bonnet on top of which was perched some sort of glittering and waving aigrette which kept up an incessant motion. After absorbing his fixed attention for a time, the continued flutter of this began to make him feel insecure. He closed his eyes.

"Why do you shut your eyes?" Mrs. Reese demanded, jealously.

"You are so bright and beautiful you dazzle me," retorted Mr. Reese, trying to be jocose.

"That is a very pretty speech," said Mrs. Reese, brightening, "but I can hardly flatter myself that you mean it. I thought, when we were first married, that you adored me, but I was cruelly deceived in you. I sometimes wonder if you have the least glimmer of affection for me,—if it is not because I am rich—"

"Belinda," cried Mr. Reese, stung by this allusion, "have I ever profited by your money, except by an occasional trip to Europe, where, of course, you needed a man's protection, and where under no circumstances is it proper for ladies to be alone, no matter what good couriers they may have, or how well they may be located. Europe is not the place for ladies except with their husbands. — They run risks, — they are likely to excite comments, — to — to — to —"

This attempt not only to justify his disinterestedness, but to carry his point about the European journey cost Mr. Reese a cruel effort.

"If you do really care about me," insisted Mrs. Reese, ignoring European travel, and holding blindly to her own grievance, "if you really have any feeling for me, why don't you say something like what you used to say — something poetic, something romantic, — something beyond the everyday prose of life?"

This harrowing question elicited no reply. Mr. Reese lay back against the cushions, his head throbbing, wretched qualms assailing him.

"If you are a man, say something," said Mrs. Reese, imperiously.

He made a convulsive clutch after a distinct idea, some formulated sentence, some word, even, which might propitiate her. What he felt that he needed was something poetic, — something romantic, — something sublimed beyond the plain prose of life. Hoping that he had found it, he opened his eyes, fixed them on his wife's face, and tried to smile, —

"Moon, — moon," he muttered, "moon, — moon —"

CHAPTER IV.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS.

MY reader will need no magic carpet to transport him to the ends of the earth, for this story will have its action within the limits of a certain section of Sycamore Hill, which contained the houses and grounds of Mrs. Reese, Dr. Jasper, Mr. Redmond, and St. John's Rectory, where the Chichesters lived. For a small area, carefully studied, may give as satisfactory results as hasty generalizations concerning a great continent. The late Mr. Darwin potted a ball of earth which he found adhering to the leg of a wounded partridge, tended it carefully, and from the seeds it contained raised no less than eighty-two different plants, of five distinct species. Thus we, too, will take a minute fraction of the circumference of mother-earth, and observe the characteristics, modifications, and differentiations, of the lives going on therein.

Mrs. Reese's estate covered a good many acres, and Dr. Jasper's small stone house, with its narrow strip of land, was niched into it, as was also Mr. Redmond's larger place. Thus it may be seen that the Reeses, Jaspers, and Redmonds were near neighbors. They lived, too, upon terms of intimacy,

although Mrs. Reese did not like to admit that any one was on equal terms with her, and was not herself a person to be easily intimate with. She was, indeed, inclined to make it a sort of grievance that the acres of fine forest at the rear of her own lawns and gardens, and extending behind the other places, were made a common ground by the young people, roamed over at their will, and used freely for archery and picnics. Still, the great lady found a yet deeper source of displeasure in the fact that the Redmonds' tennis-court was a popular resort, while her own was generally empty; it was also incomprehensible to her that the Jaspers' house was the centre of all sorts of hospitalities. "You see there is nothing 'homey' about our house," it was Miriam's habit to say, when her mother complained that she was passed by while everybody went to the Jaspers' and Redmonds' instead; "people sit on thorns in our fine chairs."

"They are the most comfortable chairs I could buy," Mrs. Reese would reply. "They cost no end of money. And as for sitting on thorns—I don't know what you mean; surely nothing could be so uncomfortable as the benches on the Redmonds' tennis-ground." Mrs. Reese's chief dread was of being reckoned among feeble personalities, of living ineffectively, and not receiving the tribute to which her real superiority of means entitled her. It always seemed to her that the Redmonds were indifferent to her, that the Jaspers laughed at her, and that even Dr. Chichester and Polly only tolerated her. It did

not suit her in the least to see Miriam taking up with these mediocre people ; depending on them for society, for amusements, for sympathy even.

Nevertheless, Miriam's expectations of life were not, nowadays, extravagant. Many things interested her, and if, occasionally, she felt that her existence was not only unsatisfactory in the present, but that it promised nothing, offered no horizon ; at other moments she was glad that she was out of the *mêlée* and need be agitated by no deep feelings — above all, by no passions. Still, she rarely met a man who was in any way attractive, but that she looked with some curiosity to see if he were likely to interest her. She was still too young not to dream a little.

Two days after the ride whose incidents were recounted in the last chapter, Miriam had dined with the Redmonds, at three o'clock. It was the object of Mr. Redmond's existence to keep himself practically interested in all the interests and pursuits of his daughters. This was no light achievement, for it was not often that he could find them all together, but on this occasion Nora, the eldest, was at the head of the table, and Madeline at her father's left hand. Both were handsome women, tall, plump, exuberant in flesh and color, with brilliant expressive eyes, masses of untidy brown hair, and an unceasing flow of talk. Mr. Redmond occasionally tried to regulate and subdue his daughters' statements and wild theorizing, which startled, dismayed, and sometimes bored him ; but the girls were so magnifi-

cently happy, so serenely confident that they were helping on the world, that he was often carried along in spite of himself. To-day Nora was full of the performances of a new medium, whose efforts had raised powerful spirits at a séance in town the preceding evening. Madeline had her own efforts to recount in the way of effecting a wonderful mind-cure. Interspersed with these narratives were lively feminine fancies, which set off their bold innovations and astounding paradoxes in less lurid lights. Mr. Redmond threw in a bit of sensible commonplace now and then, as if to weight his daughters' balloon and keep it from flying altogether out of sight. Lorraine's serious and intense views of the real business of life were as little moved by her father's conversation as by her sisters' enthusiasms. She candidly regarded spiritualism as an imposture and mind-cures as an absurdity; still, she conceded that they might be a useful stop-gap for female energies, which, once put into play on subjects that departed from formula and tradition, were likely to arrive finally at useful results.

The Redmonds were not people who regarded meals as ceremonies, to be lingered over for their own sake, and before four o'clock they were taking their coffee on the veranda, lured out-of-doors by the charming weather, which was as warm as July.

"Suppose we should play tennis, instead of going to drive," suggested Lorraine. "I will run over and ask Edward Jasper; and if his brother and the visitor care to play, they can come, too. From what

I hear of Bertie Jasper, however, I am certain he will be of no earthly use to anybody."

"Surely, my child," interposed Mr. Redmond, mildly, "you would hardly think of going over in person to invite those young men."

"Why not, papa?"

"Four men," said Miriam, laughing, "two of them perfect strangers to you, might seem to be something formidable to encounter."

"Do you suppose I am afraid of four men,—of thirty men?" demanded Lorraine. "I assure you I am not. Such tremors, such hesitations belong to quite a different epoch from this. Papa, you and Miriam are a good deal alike, and it does seem to me that neither one of you realizes the fact that you are living in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. You cling to the old-fashioned troubadour notion of women. Please, papa, have Robert carry down the rackets and balls, and I will bring Edward Jasper and meet you at the ground," and Lorraine darted down the steps and across the lawn.

"Dear me, dear me!" murmured Mr. Redmond to himself. "I am afraid all that is quite shocking, not at all the correct thing. My dear Miss Reese, you had the right idea; four men ought to be something formidable to a young girl. Four men, and two of them utter strangers! Of course, Mrs. Jasper is there, and she—yet, at the same time, there are certain proprieties to be observed. I would have gone myself, or Robert might have been sent. But Lorraine is so impulsive—she is so sudden—so

startling. An idea forms in her mind, not gradually and logically, but like a — like a — in fact, she acts without thought. Nora, my dear, you are eleven years older than your little sister, — you stand in a mother's place to her, — you ought to teach her better."

Miriam was laughing. Lorraine's little figure, clad in white serge, had long since vanished behind the clumps of rhododendrons just pushing into flower.

"Oh, papa, do not expect me to put foolish, old-fashioned notions into the child's head," said Nora. "I have always, on the contrary, been anxious to make her feel that the matter of sex has been strangely over-rated as an explanation of the facts of everyday life, and that it is actually of little or no consequence. Those artificial ideas," Nora continued, fixing her bright, dreamy eyes on Miriam, "that girls must constantly remember that they are the females of the human species cannot too soon become obsolete, I think. In future, it seems quite evident, they are likely to count for very little. The coming woman, I take it, is to be comparatively sexless."

"Nora, Nora," ejaculated Mr. Redmond, "what are you talking about?"

"I like what she says amazingly," said Miriam. "I wish I might live in the far future. I suppose, Nora, the sexless woman is to be evolved by natural selection and survival of the fittest."

"That law seems to be the basis of all development," Miss Redmond replied. "So far as I may be permitted to draw inferences from my knowledge of

the spiritual world, I should say that the spirits were far in advance of us in point of freedom from conventionalities and hampering ideas of what is proper and traditional."

"So I should judge from all I have heard of the spirits," said Miriam.

"I am afraid you do not mean to compliment the spirits, — but you shall see. Just think, Miriam, papa has actually consented to investigate spiritualism a little."

"Scientifically, you must understand, Miss Reese," put in Mr. Redmond. "The fact is, I can't have Nora running about into all sorts of places; so it seems the safest way to allow her to have a séance at home."

"Papa says I am a wildly centrifugal force," declared Nora, "and I retort that he is absurdly centripetal. We are going to make mutual concessions. I am to stay at home this summer and chaperon Lorraine. (The idea of her needing a chaperon, or my undertaking to play the part!)" Then, he is to engage Mr. Titus, the great medium, to come out here. Behold me henceforth an example of filial obedience. A thousand duties and inclinations draw me away at this moment, but instead I am to chaperon a game of tennis. I have taken up literary work. I find that if I carry a pad and pencil in my pocket, and jot down my ideas at odd moments, I can sometime gather quite a sheaf of valuable notes after hours of seemingly frivolous occupation."

"I wish I could fill up my life as successfully as you do," said Miriam.

"Then set about being incessantly industrious. A woman is not happy unless she has something tangible to offer as an excuse for her being alive. Now, our grandmothers and great-grandmothers had their spinning and weaving, their daughters' trousseaux, their bed and table linen to get ready; they had, besides, their wines and cordials to make, their soap-boiling, candle-making, dairy work, and meat-salting to do. They did not need to question their right to existence. What women require in order to be happy is something to do. No matter what it is — but *something to do*."

Nora had risen and with her large, fluent, and easy discourse was moving around the veranda, ringing the bell and giving orders about tea. "Now, Miriam, we will go," she said. "Come, papa, let us see if Lorraine found anybody to make up her game."

The two parties met just as they reached the tennis-ground, and Lorraine came up to her father with an air of triumph.

"I did very well, you see," she remarked, pointing to her companions — Dr. Jasper and three young men. "That is Mr. Herbert Jasper, just returned from the grand tour. Shake hands with him, papa. And the other is Mr. Forbes — Mr. Forbes, this is my father; Nora, let me introduce Mr. Forbes. Miss Reese, Mr. Forbes wishes to be presented to you. Four men, you see, Miriam, as you predicted,

four men ! Yet I am still alive. Dr. Jasper said it was like sending a sprat to catch a whale."

Miriam had given her fingers to Bertie with one of her half-smiles, bowed to the stranger, and nodded to the doctor. Edward Jasper, whom she seemed not to have noticed, had at once approached her.

"Those figurative expressions always puzzle me," she said to him, in an intimate tone. "I am not sure which of you is the whale."

"It is one of the new arrivals. I leave you to discover which," answered Edward.

"Bertie I know," remarked Miriam, "or used to know. He would never swallow me—I am sure of that. Who and what is Mr. Forbes?"

"He seems a quiet fellow, but we take to him remarkably."

"I think I do. There is something effective about his way of standing about and not saying anything."

"If he is going to conquer without effort in that way I may as well shoot him at once. I liked him, Miss Reese, I cordially liked him—and now you have made me hate him."

Lorraine had come up and slipped her hand under Miriam's arm.

"Mr. Herbert Jasper never plays tennis," she observed, tossing her pretty head. "Luckily, Mr. Forbes does. What is your brother's strong point Mr. Edward?"

"Bertie must speak for himself. It is sufficient for me to be called to account for my own deficiencies."

Bertie, an Antinöus-looking youth, faultlessly dressed in gray tweeds, smiled languidly, and crossed over to a bench, saying, as he did so, "My strong point is sitting down."

Miriam was still looking at Paul Forbes, who turned and met her eyes, then came up to her at once.

"Do you play tennis, Miss Reese?" he asked.

"Never if I can help it. I am like Bertie, and never do anything if I can help it."

"You like to be coerced?"

"Nobody ever yet coerced Miss Reese," put in Edward.

"I seem to be coerced by circumstances at present. Lorraine will need me to make up her game. I wish I had my racquet. I never play with any racquet but my own."

"Permit me to go for it," said Forbes, on the instant, and he was off before Miriam had a chance to reply.

"I told you I should have to shoot him," said Edward. "I see plainly he has come here for the purpose of cutting what small ground I could call my own from beneath my feet."

"He will be no end of a useful visitor if he always rises to the occasion in that way."

"You have told me more than once not to be officious — that you hated zeal."

"Have I? By the way, by what instinct did Mr. Forbes set off for our house by the bee-line? How did he happen to know where I live?"

"I told him this morning. He seems quiet, but he is attentive."

"Who is he?"

"He came from Boston, but has lived in Europe since he was seventeen. He began by being an artist, but is nowadays more of a literary man. He says he is sick of Europe, and wants to live and die in America. He declares he is willing to do anything—no matter what. He confesses his poverty."

"Is he married or single?"

"Oh, unmarried; he has no relatives except one sister, who lives at Albany and has seven children."

"He looks about thirty."

"More than thirty—considerably more, I should say. Do you call him good-looking?"

"I had not thought about his looks," said Miriam, moving towards the chalked court. "I wish Polly were here," she remarked to Lorraine. "Polly could have played in my place."

"Where is Polly?" asked Edward.

"They have a clerical tea-party—fourteen clergymen. Polly has been mincing chicken for salad, and making devilled lobster, and beating mayonnaises all day. Poor Polly!"

"Pretty Polly! I wish I were one of those clergymen," said Edward. He sauntered across to tell his brother that Miss Chichester was busy at home. Miriam glanced from one of the young Jaspers to the other. Edward was half-listless, half-impulsive in his looks and attitudes. Herbert was better balanced—his look, bearing, manner, tone, all seemed

to show an equilibrium of forces alike under control.

"Bertie has grown handsome," Miriam murmured to Lorraine, whose slim little hand was still under her arm. "He's too handsome — don't you think so?"

"He is so quiet — he is so deadly quiet he irritates me," whispered Lorraine. "He makes me nervous. I wonder if anything could break the charm. I should like to steal up behind him and say 'Bo,' and see if it would make him start."

"I wish you would!"

"I mean to, — see if I do not."

Paul Forbes was already at Miriam's side with her racquet in his hand.

"Thank you," she said, as if, instead of taking so much trouble, he had simply picked up the implement from the box. "Lorraine," she proceeded, "unless you object, I will choose Mr. Forbes for my partner." She had hitherto spoken without a glance at him, but she now looked over her shoulders, and inquired, "Do you play well?" Their eyes met again, and the color which rarely showed in Miriam's olive pallor, rose to her cheeks.

"I am not an expert," he returned; "but I shall have the ambition to do my best with such a partner."

Miss Reese played extremely well, and showed her usual distinction in the way she moved; she wasted no effort, and never marred her points, as Lorraine did perpetually by eagerness and over-haste. Nevertheless, one watched Lorraine with admiration. Her

blue eyes seemed to emit flames as she stood poised, waiting for the ball in air; her cheeks were scarlet, her lips were folded close together, and her whole heart and soul seemed staked on the issue of the game. She had time and inclination, however, for an impish freak, and once in "serving," sent her ball sidewise, straight towards Herbert Jasper, who was sitting on the bench a little apart from the rest of the group of lookers-on. The young man had the alternative of dodging the missive, or catching it in his hand as it whizzed toward him. He caught it with the same easy gesture with which he would have whisked off a troublesome fly, and handed it to his father.

"Why, throw it back yourself!" exclaimed Dr. Jasper.

"I shouldn't know how, — I never played tennis in my life," said Bertie, gently.

Dr. Jasper burst out laughing, while Mr. Redmond gazed at the young fellow with amazement.

"I seem to remember, Bertie, when your exploits at base-ball and cricket were bulletined on the Ledger building," he remarked, with a sort of indignation.

"I used to play marbles," said Bertie. "I used to have a passion for tarts and taffy."

"He has put away childish things," said Nora Redmond, smiling encouragingly at the young man. "He has gone higher up the ladder."

"Hope he has, with all my heart," said the Doctor.

"What is your bent, — what are you interested

in?" Nora went on to inquire of Bertie. "What did you find in the Old World that you liked? Historic charm, politics, — or what?"

"Not much. Things are pretty well used up over there."

"You went in for art, I suppose. Painting, sculpture, —"

"I haven't gone in for that yet. Art does very well when you haven't got anything else."

"You like real life. I am glad you are not a dilettante."

"Life seems to me an ingeniously contrived system of things to bore one."

"There is something higher."

"One would like to hope so."

"Psychical experiences are what one most needs."

"I should enjoy having a few."

"Have you had any?"

"Beg pardon, I don't quite catch your idea."

"I mean, have you begun to wait and watch for the spiritual forces underlying the débris of follies, fashion, and worldliness, that clog human lives, — and which, when realized to our consciousness, link our existences to those of beings who have advanced to a higher spiritual plane."

"Oh, I think I understand, — you mean dreams, ghosts, table-tipping, thought-reading, and all that."

"Yes; have you had any of those experiences which link you to the spiritual side of things?"

"None, — none, I assure you, — nothing of that sort, — nothing in the least like it," affirmed Herbert, lan-

guidly but positively. "I am deadly materialistic myself."

"He is your own son, I see, doctor," said Miss Redmond, with perfect good-nature, for she was not used to finding sympathy with her hobbies a predominant feature in any of the Jaspers.

"I suppose he is," returned the Doctor. "But why the deuce can't he take more after me? Why, at Bertie's age, with those two pretty girls down there, I could no more have kept at this distance than I could have shut myself up in a dark room when the sun shone. That friend of yours is a good deal more alive than you are, Bertie."

"Yes, Forbes likes to put a great deal into his life. He is always ready to take part in whatever is going on,— but it wears on him,— keeps him thin and nervous. I am very careful about myself. I hate to feel seedy. Paul will never refuse a chance for an adventure at any hour of the day or night. Now I am the most methodical of men. I sleep just so much,— eat just so much, drink just so much, read, study, and go into women's society just so much. There are three things I utterly detest; debt, repentance, and indigestion. Accordingly, I make a point of keeping clear of them. Paul dreads nothing, and he risks them all the moment temptation comes in his way."

The two older men exchanged glances.

"I am glad to hear that you kept out of debt," said Mr. Redmond. "It is hard sometimes for a young fellow to steer clear of it."

"I wouldn't have the weight of it on my conscience," said Bertie. "The moment I was in danger of being cramped I let my father know what my necessities were."

The Doctor found this speech characteristic enough to be amusing; but Bertie was quite serious. "Your friend Forbes has no father to take his necessities into account," said Dr. Jasper.

"I did not mean to say that Paul Forbes was in debt. I happen to know that he is not. What I mean is that he risks it—he risks everything. He is too reckless. He was earning a good living in Paris, but, all at once, made up his mind to quit Europe, even if he starved elsewhere. And here he is, with no idea how he is to make his bread and butter."

Mr. Redmond pursed up his lips, and shook his head. Such traits did not commend themselves to the rich father of four unmarried daughters.

"Oh, he won't starve," said the Doctor. "He'll get on. Just watch his play. He does not waste himself, but, at the same time, loses no chance. Compare him with Edward, who beats the air. Edward must make poor little Lorraine furious."

Miss Redmond nodded. "Most men do," she said, blandly. "Lorraine does not think too well of any of you."

"Is your sister grown up, or a child, Miss Redmond?" inquired Bertie. "She is so petite, I cannot quite make out what her age is."

"Grown up? Hardly yet. Let me see,—how

old is she, papa? Just turned nineteen, is she not? Yes, just nineteen."

The game was over, and the four players came up the bank to the group on the benches.

"How about your going to Europe, Miriam?" inquired Nora.

"We are not going." Miriam said this with an air of dismissing the subject, but, meeting the Doctor's glance, colored slightly and half smiled. He seemed to read her thoughts. He nodded and laughed.

"You couldn't go off and leave Bertie, could you?" he asked, jocularly. "What do you think of my boy, anyhow, Miss Miriam Reese?"

Miriam glanced at Herbert, who stood, handsome, impressive, and impassive, at a little distance.

"I was saying just now that he had grown too good-looking," she remarked, in her clear, cool way.

"There, Bertie, there's a challenge for you! Now, Lorraine, what do *you* think of my little one, — my Joseph?"

"Is he your Joseph?" asked Lorraine, sceptically. "That accounts for the magnificence of his coat, I suppose."

Well aimed as this school-girlish impertinence seemed to be, it failed to elicit any deviation from Herbert's absolute composure. He continued to stand as he had stood, without the least change of feature, or the faintest sign of being moved by any human interest; while the rest of the party gossiped and chatted together, exchanging invitations, mak-

ing engagements, and arranging a general system of small festivities in honor of the new-comers. Whether the young fellow supposed that by contributing a handsome person and a faultless deportment to society he was acquitting himself of all obligation, we do not undertake to decide. He had apparently gained altitudes of the most surprising calm, when, all at once, somebody at his elbow exclaimed, explosively:—

“Bo!”

Bertie turned to discover Lorraine Redmond, her small face aflame and her eyes full of laughter.

“I beg pardon,” said he, uncovering his head; “what was it you were saying?”

“I said ‘Bo,’” giggled Lorraine. “I declared to Miriam that I would do it. I just wanted to see if you were absolutely carved out of wood.”

“If you would like to experiment further,” returned Bertie, with the most exquisite gentleness, “I am quite at your service.”

Lorraine could not help feeling a trifle worsted, but, with a little shrug, she nodded and said:—

“Oh no, thanks; I am entirely satisfied,” and retreated in good order.

CHAPTER V.

PAUL FORBES.

"It is late," said Miriam Reese. "I must make my adieux. I will go home through the woods."

She kissed the girls, and flashed her characteristic half-smile at the remainder of the group.

"May I go with you, to carry back your bat?" asked Forbes, keeping at her side.

Miriam assented, and the two walked away quite indifferent to the surprise they aroused among the lookers-on. It had usually been Edward Jasper's privilege to saunter back by the side of Miss Reese, and it was so disconcerting to him to be thus forestalled that he could not control a certain blankness which took possession of his features and made his lips suggest a silent whistle at his own discomfiture.

"Bertie, that friend of yours is a wide-awake young man," said the Doctor. "He certainly loses no time."

"Forbes is a very bright fellow," said Bertie. "I never before saw him in the society of women. But I always knew that he was a very bright fellow."

Meanwhile, quite unconscious that he had put poison into the cup of Edward Jasper, the bright

fellow was walking into the wood by the side of Miss Reese. He was not without some dramatic sense of the effect he was producing in making this brilliant exit from the tennis-court, for he had sometimes lost opportunities like the present, and he was not destitute of ambition for social success. He was interested in Miss Reese; he had a quick eye for beauty, and she had already more than once shown him the charm which could lie in her glance and smile; but the moment he was under the oaks and chestnuts, he was almost ready to forget his companion. He had to shake himself, as it were, before he remembered to say something about the beauty of the day, the fine trees. He saw violets and anemones still blooming in the shady places, and he begged her permission to let him gather some. She waited for him while he strode hither and thither finding the blossoms in unexpected places; presently, he had quite a nosegay, and he brought it to her.

"I would offer it to you if I thought you would take it," said he, with some naïveté.

"Why do you doubt my taking it?" she returned.

He looked at her with a bright, meditative glance, which seemed to be taking her in. "I don't know yet," said he, "what it may be your habit to like, at least to accept."

"I do not lead a very vivid or varied existence," she remarked; "almost anything is enough to amuse me."

"This is all very vivid, very varied to me," said Forbes. "Everything I have seen to-day is so novel and so delightful that my head is a little turned."

"I am not quite sure what you mean."

She wondered about him. From the moment her eye fell on Forbes she saw that he was different from the others. She hoped he was not paying her stupid compliments, and that he was not presumptuous enough to pretend to any mental turmoil on her account.

"You are used to all this," he began, then stopped.

"To walking through the wood after playing tennis?"

"Yes, partly." He looked at her again with an air of not wishing to stretch her patience to the point of accepting what she might call romanticism. "You see," he went on, "Herbert Jasper invited me to visit him,—he quite insisted; and although it is no habit of mine to make visits, I yielded. Mrs. Jasper gave me the kindest greeting—she had prepared a room expressly for me, the most charming room; the whole house is so pretty, so comfortable. We dined early and went on the veranda, and all at once appeared that delicious apparition they call 'Lorraine,' insisting that we should go over and play tennis. I need hardly tell the rest. If my head were not a little turned, I should be a stronger man than I am."

It did not escape Miriam that he was moved. Anything she could answer seemed vapid and value-

less, and she waited for him to explain himself more fully.

"I have been knocking round the world for fourteen years," he continued. "I was seventeen when I went to Paris, and now I am thirty-one. I have always been a little homesick. This seems like coming home."

"Have you any home?" she asked.

"A home! Goodness, no. I shall never have a home." He looked up at the trees overhead. "I wonder," said he, "that it does not depress me to come to this delightful place. I have before this felt a kind of anguish at the sight of other people's possessions. But at this moment I do not feel in the least degree miserable."

"I am glad of that," said Miriam. "Misery is my own prerogative."

"Is it? I always have an affinity for miserable people," said Forbes. "Your happy people have no imagination."

Miriam changed the subject, as if her curiosity regarding the stranger were still unappeased.

"So you went abroad when you were seventeen, and have remained ever since. How happened you to go, in the first place?"

"I had an ambition to be a painter. I went into an atelier in Paris."

"Did you become a painter?"

"No, no, indeed."

"Somebody alluded to you as an artist."

"Oh, I make designs when I have time." He

spoke carelessly, and looked up the lawn. The sun was low, but it lighted up the house, and the great trees which stood about it, with striking brilliancy; and the delicate green of the motionless tops of the lofty tulips and chestnuts had a remote aërial effect against the azure of the sky. The gleam and radiance of this upper illumination were strongly contrasted with the rich deep colors of the purplish beeches below the evergreens, massed as a background for the magnolias, the lilacs, and hawthorns. On the left, the motionless ponds gleamed blue, surrounded by pale green willows and birches just pushing into leaf. At the right were the flower-gardens.

"Is this the place where you were born?" Forbes asked, suddenly turning to Miriam. "Have you lived here all your life?"

"Only for ten years," she returned. "We are *nouveaux riches*. My mother bought it all ready-made. I suppose you find it hideous and out of taste."

He looked at her with some surprise, — for he was profoundly impressed by the beauty of the place.

"It charms me," said he. "At this moment, nothing could be more effective than those lights and shadows."

"It has the charm of novelty to you," said Miriam. "I always take it for granted that what we have is ugly and in false taste. Whenever my mother buys anything new, I observe to my father, 'Ugly, is it not?' and he replies, 'Infernally ugly.'"

"Come, now, you are spoiled. You have too many good things in this world. Do you call that clock-tower ugly, rising above the trees."

"But a clock-tower is an affectation; why should we have a clock-tower? The more beautiful it is, the less it is adapted to the prosaicism and *ennui* of our surroundings."

Forbes looked her in the face, and laughed. "I told you you were spoiled," said he. "If you were a man, like me, — a blind teetotum who has been knocked about all his life, — you would appreciate the worth of a continuous, unhurried existence among surroundings like these."

Miriam did not reply, but watched her companion while his eye rested on the domes of the hot-houses, which took on all colors and shone like a conflagration. The air was perfectly quiet and full of fresh odor; the verdure of trees, plants, and grass was at the point when its color is most delicious. Miriam all at once felt the beauty of it, of every leaf and bud and blade of grass — she suddenly remembered with special vividness that there was a little shady spot by the pond where a profusion of violets grew. "Come this way," she said; and Forbes followed her up a little foot-path along the banks of the chain of ponds, until they came to the upper one, which had high banks overgrown with untrimmed shrubs and creepers. Across the upper half of this pool drooped a hemlock, its thick roots imbedded in the bank, and its strange, distorted trunk bending far over the water and trailing its branches in the water. The

whole bank was covered with violets, scentless, but so vividly blue that they created a little azure heaven of their own, and illumined the melancholy, fantastic spot. The cedars stood mystically transfigured in the background. Forbes looked at the violets and then at Miriam. Each smiled; then she led the way back into the open lawn.

"Tell me about yourself," she said, when they were again walking towards the house, — "when a man calls himself a blind teetotum, I am inquisitive and long to have him define himself."

Forbes had no particular wish to talk about his own career; but he gave her an animated glance, and said: "You see, I set out to be something brilliant. I intended to prosper as a painter. I saw no reason why I should not be successful and have my share of the world."

"Haven't you got your share of the world?"

"Did you ever hear the story of Gudbrand of the Mountain?" said he. "No? well; Gudbrand waxed ambitious, and wanted to lay up money; and, accordingly, took his good milch-cow to market, intending to get a high price for her. But when he reached the market he found no one to buy, so exchanged his cow for a horse, on which he decided to ride home in fine style and impress his neighbors. But the horse proved to be an antic beast, full of tricks, who reared and threw him; and he was glad enough to palm off his prancing steed on somebody, in return for a plain, honest pig, sure to be a comfort. Do all he might, however, he could not persuade the pig to budge an

inch towards home; so he parted with the pig for a strong, handsome goat, a genuine treasure of a goat. The goat, however, led him such a lively dance up rocks and down precipices that he was glad enough to get rid of the goat for a sheep. So he went on bartering one thing for another, in a descending scale, until he finally reached home with nothing in the world to show for the good milch-cow he took to market, but glad to have kept his life."

Forbes looked at Miriam with a whimsical smile.

"Here I am," said he, "my good milch-cow gone — nothing to show, but glad of my life."

Miriam raised her eyes to his face, and studied it a little, wondering if he were actually a disappointed man.

"I dare say you have had the best sort of life," she observed.

"Don't think so for a single moment!" he exclaimed. "I'm a wretched failure. I had plenty of energy and an honest love of art; I exhibited one picture which sold fairly well; then, ambitious to make a little more money, I began to write. I thought it a clever thing to undertake criticisms, and, once embarked as a *littérateur*, I was overrun with engagements which it took me years to fulfil."

"What have you written?"

"Oh, critiques, the letter-press for art-publications, illustrated books of travel, — I have prepared elaborate catalogues and written up famous collections. I liked the occupation at first — it gave me

a living and enabled me to go everywhere and see everything, for every impression was available. It seemed to me that by appreciating nature and works of art, defining them, plucking the heart of their mystery out of them as it were, I should eventually reach a point where I could take up my real work with inspiration of a deeper and truer sort. But that time never came, — I was always working to get through something, always running here and there to get the final touch, — the impression which was to round off and finish everything. The fact is, if a man wants to do anything in the world he must not spend himself in appreciating and sympathizing with and criticising everything he comes across."

"You have come back to America, then, to take up painting again," said Miriam.

"No," said Paul, with fire in his eyes. "I came back because I hated Europe. I am too old to begin over again. I suppose I can pick up a living here, just as I did abroad. I wanted to come home, although I have no home to come to."

"Your parents are dead?"

"They died before I went abroad. My one sister was married the day I sailed. She is a busy, prosperous woman now, wrapped up in her husband and children." They had stood still for a time, but at this moment Miriam began to move on, and Forbes followed her half disconcerted. "I never talked so much about myself before," said he. "I told you my head was a little turned."

"You are to stay here now, — I hope, — you will

spend the summer," she said, although conscious that she ought not to have said it.

"I do not know," said Forbes, slowly. "At this moment, it seems to me as if I must stay here forever."

Miriam smiled, and, although they were approaching the house, with its columns, bays, balconies, and many-faced windows all open to the sunset, Forbes felt bold.

"I hope you are not going to Europe," he said, softly, but with a clear, deliberate glance.

"No, I shall not go to Europe. I am like you, Mr. Forbes,—I hate Europe."

"I wonder why you hate Europe," he said as she paused just before putting her foot on the step.

"That was what I said to myself a little while ago," murmured Miriam,— "I wondered why you hated Europe."

"I will tell you whenever you ask me," said Forbes.

"I shall ask you, then."

She took the racquet from him, and stepped along the marble-paved court, and stood under the high pillars. "Good-afternoon, Mr. Forbes," she said, then turned and entered the door.

He stood still a moment, with his head uncovered, after she had vanished. He had one glimpse through the open door and windows of the house inside; the low sun struck through here and there, and gleamed and sparkled on crystal and porcelain and rich stuffs. He turned, and his eyes rested on great tree-

trunks, and glades of rich grass bordered by rare, beautiful shubberies. There was something peculiarly exhilarating to him in the whole scene; and he felt it at once became a part of his impressions of Miss Reese. He strode down the path, took his bearings, found his way across the turf to a gap in the hedge, and entered Mrs. Jasper's flower-garden. Mrs. Jasper was there, looking at her seeds, which the warm sun had stimulated into a hot-bed growth. She showed them to Forbes, told him their names, and received from him in return all the facts he had ever gathered about flowers. She needed a pair of scissors and a bit of twine; he flew into the house to find them, and brought them to her with an absolute glow of satisfaction. It was, as he had told Miss Reese, pleasant to him to be there, and he was urged by a grateful longing to do something in return for all the pleasure he received. Mrs. Jasper, on her side, was inspired by a lively sense of Forbes's good services in behalf of her son Herbert. The acquaintance had begun in Naples, the December before, by Paul's knocking down a man who had his stiletto at Herbert Jasper's breast. Bertie, in some unconscious way, had roused the wrath of the Neapolitan, and, when addressed by him in a torrent of angry menace, had haughtily bidden him hold his tongue and get out of the way. Paul Forbes had turned the street corner just in time to see his countryman in danger, and Bertie, who had felt the prick of the steel, took it for granted that Paul Forbes had saved his life. However this may have been, Forbes had

acted promptly and effectively, he had won Herbert's gratitude and admiration, and the incident began an intimate acquaintance.

Mrs. Jasper had made the two friends comfortable in adjoining rooms, which opened into a little nook which Edward called his study. There the three young men gathered to smoke a cigar, before going to bed, and talk over the events of the day. Edward Jasper thought it not impossible that he should presently feel hostile towards their visitor, but he did not intend to be deterred from making his acquaintance on that account. He might learn something from him.

"She is a piquant, saucy, spoiled little creature," Paul Forbes was remarking, in reply to certain reminiscences of Bertie's. "If she said 'Bo' to me, I should be pretty sure to retaliate."

"How?" inquired Bertie, with an approach to eagerness.

"I will not commit myself so far as to say exactly how I should retaliate. I leave it to your imagination. She's decidedly pretty—don't you think so?"

"She looks precisely like a wax doll."

"Or a china shepherdess. Well, what can be prettier than a wax doll or a china shepherdess?"

"Miss Reese is in a different style. Did you admire her?" asked Edward Jasper.

"Very much," said Forbes. "She is very self-possessed for so young a woman."

"Twenty-four,—just my age," said Bertie. "She seems to me, however, a little less self-possessed than

she used to be. She had had a tolerably wide range, to be sure, but she always made me feel a trifle crude and rudimentary."

"You say she is a tremendous heiress, — how happens it she has not married?"

"She was engaged once; the wedding-day was fixed, then she broke it all off."

"When was that?"

"Two years ago. She was to have married the eldest son of a marquis."

"And she broke it off! Why did she break it off?"

"Nobody knows."

"Is she capricious?" Paul Forbes was thinking how she looked when she said that she hated Europe, and he wondered if this broken engagement was a painful regret.

"We will ask you a month hence if she is capricious," said Edward. "You seem to be in her good graces at present."

"I? Don't put that into my head," said Paul. "I'm intoxicated already. Never in my life have I had such a delightful day. I have lost my heart to your mother. She is an angel. The young ladies are charming, but they are nothing compared to her."

"You have not seen Polly Chichester yet. Polly is our beauty."

"Oh, I can't stand any more," said Paul. "At least, I am thankful that my introduction to the beauty was postponed."

"She is a delightful girl. Just the girl any man wants to marry, only she has not a cent of money, and nobody can afford it."

"After I have made a fortune," said Bertie, "I think I shall marry Polly."

"How are you going to make your fortune?" asked Edward.

"I have not decided yet. I waited to make up my mind until I got back to America; now I shall settle down at once. I have taken pains not to imbibe any prejudices against any honest means of making money, and at the same time not to have any prepossessions. It is all the same to me what I do — all I want is to go into the best thing."

"There's no end of good sense in what you say," said Edward, who could not help feeling that his younger brother far surpassed him in knowledge of the world. "Now, I made false starts, — I let myself be carried away, — I idealized life, don't you see? It appeared to me at first start that it was a fine thing to be a lawyer, — such a career, you know, opens up everything to a man who has certain gifts. Plenty of lawyers get twenty thousand dollar fees, and naturally I took it for granted that I should get twenty thousand dollar fees. But after studying a year I knew myself better, and that I was not that sort of a man. In order to achieve success you must, to begin with, cram yourself with a thousand dreary formulas which relate to nothing in justice, reason, or common-sense, — these are as assimilative to the mind as so many stones to the stomach. But,

all the same, you must have them, for the man who can most utterly overwhelm and stun judge and jury with interpretations, precedents, citations, and authorities gets his case. To be a good lawyer, you have at once to be a piece of parchment with all the juices of humanity dried out of you, and also a living, breathing creature capable of illusions and enthusiasms, blind to facts, yet far-sighted enough to seize at a glance the whole situation, its possible issues and its consequences. No, I couldn't be a lawyer. I wanted something more tangible, more concrete. I couldn't make a fire without fuel. In law, everything depends on a bold guess and plausible arguments. I said to myself I wanted to know the absolute truth about something. Accordingly, although it was against my father's advice, I took up surgery and medicine. It seemed the right thing to go to nature herself, — swing the door right open, grasp fact, and rest on science. It was indeed a magnificent idea, — that of getting at the secrets of life. I deceived myself, however, — I did not get at the secrets of life."

"The secrets of life don't do themselves up in little parcels and lie about like nuggets ready to be picked up," remarked Forbes. "One has to grub away until he gets hold of the shadow of an idea; — the moment he has it it turns every ugly shape like the old man of the sea, but he must cling to it like grim death, and force it into the form and substance that he desires. I suppose, after studying medicine, you took up architecture?"

"I tried literature, next — I wrote a novel. You haven't read my novel?"

"No! let me have it, and I'll go through it before I sleep."

"It bears not being read. The critics declared that it was the very worst novel that ever was written, but I'm not altogether sure of that. It took me two months to write it, and it entertained me at any rate. I had a capital plot. My heroine was a Sarah Bernhardt sort of woman, — tall, thin, soulless, passionate, intense. I made her renounce her lover, who was poor, and marry a millionaire, whom she kills with a slow poison. When he is dead, she sends at once for her old lover, tells him with rapture that she is again free, and at last rich. The young man, who is a medical student, has a suspicion that all is not right, — and thinks it worth while to exhume the remains of the millionaire and analyze the contents of his stomach. My medical training served me here, you see. He discovers that the millionaire has died from arsenical poisoning. The young fellow discloses to the heroine the fact of this horrible enlightenment, and repudiates her. She commits suicide."

Forbes laughed outright. "It seems to remind me of some French novel I have read," he remarked.

"I don't like that graveyard sort of things myself," observed Bertie, fastidiously. "I never could understand why you couldn't take up something in good taste."

"I wanted to let my imagination soar. You

would have felt so yourself if you had been at work for years, dig, dig, dig, first at law and then at medicine."

"Your imagination ran dry after this effort."

"I don't know about that; I fancy I have got a good deal more imagination than I know how to manage. But I decided that my vocation did not lie in literature. The truth is, there is no room in the world nowadays for a quiet, sensible fellow like me. I don't want to elbow and push and hold on by my teeth. Formerly, the ranks were all open, and there was room for talent. Look at my father; all he had to do was to study a little now and then while he danced and flirted his way through college, then settle down here. I give you my word, he knows very little about the medical profession; he is strangely limited in his ideas — hasn't kept along with the improvements at all — often goes out and leaves his thermometer and stethoscope at home: yet he has been a very successful man."

"I fancy," said Bertie, — "not that I mean to commit myself, — but I fancy that I shall try brokerage or banking — something with money in it."

"Why not go out to Montana and keep a sheep ranch? I'll give up architecture and join you. That is the thing to do nowadays. I confess it attracts me. I have to work hard to put the notion of that sort of life out of my head and stick to architecture. It would just suit me to live on a ranch."

"I don't think it would suit me," said Bertie. "As I said, I don't allow myself to have a distaste

for anything, but I feel a presentiment that I shall abide within the limits of civilization."

"Polly Chichester would make a delightful ranchera."

"I commit myself to nothing; but it does not seem likely that I shall set my wife to making butter and cheeses."

"It fills me with envy to hear you both talk about a congenial career," said Paul Forbes. "My problem is how to earn my individual daily bread and butter. It hardly occurs to me as a possible condition of my life that I could earn enough for two."

"Marry a rich wife," said Bertie, significantly.

"I might say the same to both of you; but you are rich already, and may choose where you will. I shall never marry — never. I have put that in my pipe and smoked it. I have seen poor men with wives they began by loving and expecting they could make an earthly paradise for. Nothing in the world could induce me to marry a poor woman, and certainly no rich woman would have me."

"I have sometimes thought," said Edward, "that a man had better think twice before he marries a rich woman. Look at old Reese. He dares not call his soul his own. Unless he were stark mad about the conundrums in 'Hamlet,' he would have no comfort in the world. Everything is Mrs. Reese's. She says, invariably, '*My* house,' '*my* carriage,' '*my* servants' — even '*my* daughter!' She trips up even Miriam if she ventures to call anything her own."

"Is the mother ambitious for her daughter?"

"Eaten up with ambition for her. That, match with Lord Wedderbourne would have suited her down to the ground."

"You say Miss Reese broke it off."

"Yes; no reason was ever given for it, but I have my own ideas about her."

"And you keep your ideas to yourself."

"I'll confide this much," said Edward. "I'll give you the sum of my experience about that girl. She is romantic—devilish romantic. She resents being married for her money."

"And this English lord was after her money."

"I suppose so—but, then, she was after his title. It's a fair exchange, and no robbery. Rich Americans feel that they lack distinction unless they can get a title. Even our best names here are only local; they don't pass current out of their native city. Look at the Biddles, even. Now, of course, a Philadelphian would sooner be a Biddle than to be a king; but yet only last winter Lord George Hurst was over here,—a serious fellow, don't you know, with a note-book, and a desire to go to the root of the matter,—and he button-holed me one night, and said, 'There is just one thing more I want to ask about. Will you please tell me what is a biddle? I hear it said, "He is a biddle," or "She was a biddle," and it is quite incomprehensible to me what a biddle is.'"

Dr. Jasper looked in to see what the three young fellows were laughing about. It was past midnight, and he broke up the divan, telling Bertie and Paul

Forbes that they must not introduce their abominable hours, which made night hideous, into his quiet household. He sat down, nevertheless, and listened to stories for an hour, capping those of the travellers with better ones gleaned out of his professional experience. When Forbes went to his own room, finally, it was very late; but, instead of undressing, he moved about restlessly, occasionally flinging himself in the great arm-chair by the side of the bed and closing his eyes. Still he could not shut away the magic mirror which filled his mind with pictures. He felt excited — as if he were in the midst of events. His youth reasserted itself, and he looked into the face of hopes, instincts, and associations which yesterday were unseen and scarcely suspected presences. All sorts of objects and ideas began to group together in his mind. That very morning, on landing in New York, he had felt himself utterly alone in the world, friendless, with only the possibility before him of manufacturing some petty interests in life which should put enough money into his purse to feed him from day to day. And now here he was, in a comfortable nest, with a joyful consciousness that there was material enough in the world above, about, and within him to make an enjoyable existence. He opened his shutters, and, as if stifled, leaned out of the window and watched the late moon come up. He listened to some far-off sound which rose and fell with a rhythm. He divined that it was the murmur of the fountain on Mrs. Reese's lawn. The hush, the

solitude, the patience of the far-off stars, the pathetic beauty of the moon, all touched him and quieted him into equilibrium. His exhilaration passed and his habitual mood returned; for Forbes was a man who, late at night and early in the morning, was devoured by a certain sadness—an almost passionate indignation with himself for spoiling his own life. Into his working hours he put plenty of zest, and found enjoyment in doing whatever presented itself to be done. But left without occupation, life seemed rather a petty game, and expectation and hope dead. What dejected him chiefly was that he grew no wiser; that he kept on learning the same lesson over and over without mastering it. He knew that he had no right to yield to the charm of this life which he had invaded, and that he must not become the dupe of his own fancies. He looked back upon his day's actions with fresh discrimination. He had poured out confessions to a woman that afternoon as if assured that she was listening. He had greatly admired her grace and ease, her assured bearing, her black dress glittering with jet, which he knew was a costly Parisian production. He admired, too, the background of that stately home. He felt the reality of the wealth which kept it up. Through all this he remembered Miriam's face—her rich, withdrawn glance.

"I am a trivial creature!" he exclaimed, almost audibly. "A woman needs only to look at me and I am shaken from head to foot! Am I going to be

the same fool over again?" Some association connected with his long bondage to a rich and capricious woman made him clench his hand involuntarily, while his face glowed with intense indignation. He postponed his thoughts and went to bed.

CHAPTER VI.

MIRIAM.

ONCE or twice in her life, Miriam Reese had acted on an impulse. For example, after being engaged to Lord Wedderbourne for three months, it suddenly occurred to her that she should like to know the actual history of his life. Two hundred thousand dollars of her mother's money were to go for his debts, and a woman might, perhaps, be pardoned for indulging a little curiosity about the way he had contracted them. She accordingly set two people at work to ferret out all the facts in his career, and the result was that she broke off her engagement. He had told her lies,—the sort of lies a man must tell an over-inquisitive girl, according to his own creed,—but she might have forgiven him his want of truth. What a clear understanding of his past seemed to bring her was the fatal conviction that he did not love her; that he only desired to marry a rich woman, be she who or what she might. Miriam had never regretted the step; she had not grown to love the man, or to find him essential to her existence. After giving him up, she began anew to study the art of living, feeling a sense of inferiority from the fact that she had hitherto looked forward to marriage as her highest good. She had tried

almost everything in the world which can be bought for money, and had decided that possessions could bring her no pleasure. She loved nature, she loved music, and she loved books; but what she loved in all these seemed only a promise of something else — more intimate, sacred, and personal. Nothing, so far, had ever satisfied her, and she was beginning to make up her mind that nothing ever would satisfy her; that Lorraine Redmond's and Polly Chichester's friendship, and Edward Jasper's love-making were all that she was likely to attain to.

There was something about Paul Forbes which changed everything on the instant. There was a sympathy and candor about his manner, his tone, and his look, which at once invested the commonest circumstances with interest. Talking with him had made Miriam feel a warmth at her heart, a fresh strength to meet whatever life might offer. He was to her more genuine than any man she had hitherto met; there was neither loftiness nor pretension about him, nor bashfulness nor boldness. He was an intelligent man, with all his faculties keenly alive; he was observant, and in his slightest look or word showed training. He was not handsome; his head was broad and full at the forehead and temples, with meditative gray eyes, set wide apart. His face narrowed towards the jaw, and, as he was clean-shaven, there was no concealment of his large, melancholy mouth, which only when he smiled became an attractive feature. He looked honest and truthful, but as if he had known the necessity

for patience. He had decision, but no sternness. His manner was his best point. He neither put himself forward nor hung back; never asserted himself, yet his presence was always felt. He made no effort at wit, strained after no effects, — what he saw a chance to do, he did effectively and on the instant, without effort or parade.

After meeting Forbes, Miriam was anxious to arouse some curiosity in her mother's mind concerning him. She took a new interest in the house as she entered it, and glanced about at familiar things, wondering how they would impress this critical stranger. When they sat at the tea-table, with its flowers and fruit, and its many-colored Venetian glass and India porcelain, it suddenly occurred to her that he might some time be sitting there opposite herself, in the vacant place.

"Bertie Jasper has improved," she remarked to her father and mother, at her right and left, "that is, he is handsomer, — he is quieter than ever, and his grand manners made Lorraine furious."

But the great lady was not interested in Herbert Jasper. She felt irritated with her husband because he refused all the dishes on the table with a dejected air, and sat back in his chair, regarding the evening meal as a mere pageant, in which he took no interest.

"But why do you not eat?" demanded Mrs. Reese. "It is so uncomfortable not to have people eat. If you want some anchovy-paste, Peter can get it."

"Anchovy-paste!" murmured Mr. Reese, "I should prefer strychnine, — I should suffer less."

"Nonsense! Nothing will hurt you, if you do not allow yourself to be afraid of it. I want you to try Madeline Redmond's mind-cure. She says it is nothing but 'fear' which enslaves and stunts the world, keeping it in bondage to sickness and pain. Come into the 'universal thought,' and you are free. Cease dreading things, running away from dangers, avoiding anything you fear may hurt you, — your 'unconscious self' does the rest. Your 'unconscious self' is always wise, always healthy, — has no aches or pains, no dyspepsia."

"I should like to have my unconscious self bear the brunt of things for a time," said Mr. Reese. "My conscious self is rather exhausted."

"Oh, we shall all begin to rally now," put in Miriam. "Everybody is going in for a little gayety. Here is an opportunity for you, mother, for Bertie Jasper has a friend with him, a Mr. Forbes, who seems really worth doing something for. Mrs. Jasper wants us all to spend to-morrow evening with her."

"I shall not go," said Mrs. Reese. "I take no interest in any of the Jaspers' friends. Your father can accompany you — I dare say he will quite have recovered his health and spirits by to-morrow night."

"Mr. Forbes is a sort of artist," began Miriam, vividly conscious that the subject was important to her, but careful not to put any special animation into her look or tone.

"Oh, don't imagine that I am likely to put up with your artists, or anybody of the sort," said Mrs. Reese.

"If you were not spoiled by the general mediocrity of this place, you would not be willing to speak to him."

This was puzzling to Miriam. She had never tried to influence her mother; at need, she had asserted herself fiercely, and compelled the good lady to yield. But it was not an easy matter to demand on a sudden that a comparatively young and good-looking stranger should be asked to the house and treated like a lion fresh from the jungle. She decided to let matters take their own course, and that she would at least not arouse a possible prejudice against Forbes by offering any arguments in his favor. There are families all the members of which are animated by the same interests,—who echo each other's praises or condemnations, are alike, cold or hot,—all seeming to possess the same mental and moral mechanism. There was none of this deteriorating unanimity, this "mush of concession," about the Reeses. They each regarded even the weather from his or her point of view, and if one recommended a dish at table the others declined it. They were not precisely hostile, but each felt it essential to concede nothing; there was a sense of self-disparagement in accepting intercourse on too easy terms. Each suspected the others of a wish to domineer, and repelled all encroachments.

When the evening meal was over Mr. Reese carried his dejection and melancholy away to the library with him, to nurse in private. Mrs. Reese and Miriam sat together in the parlor, or drawing-room, as it was called by the great lady and her household.

The evening ended at ten, but nevertheless it seemed very long to both mother and daughter. Mrs. Reese addressed all her most telling arguments in favor of a trip to Europe, and Miriam parried them as best she could. When she was finally in her own room, she experienced a sensation of physical relief, as if she had been cramped and tortured. She threw herself on a lounge, closed her eyes and gave herself up to musings over the walk through the wood. The flowers Forbes had given her were in a vase on the table beside her. How pleasant and natural it had all been! How much he had told her! How honest and how simple his confession was. He had evidently worked faithfully, but he had known disappointment, disenchantment, failure doubtless. She liked him the better for being unsuccessful; she said to herself that only mediocrities flourish in the world. He was poor. A sudden boldness animated her as she thought of what her mother's wealth might do for a man like that. "It shall be," she whispered to herself, and she sprang up, feeling the currents of a rich vital force of resolve run through her veins. She paced to and fro with rapid steps, until all at once she caught sight of herself in the glass. At the reflection of her brilliant eyes, her flushed, glowing cheeks, and smiling lips, she first stared, then experienced a moment of intense shame. Six hours before she had barely heard the name of this stranger of whom she was now thinking as her future husband. She condemned herself, felt guilty of weak-minded folly; then forgot, and fell a-dreaming again.

CHAPTER VII.

A LITTLE RIFT.

FORBES, having lost some of the illusions of youth, thought it not improbable that Miss Reese would have repented her condescension by the time she saw him again. He had occasion to congratulate himself on his knowledge of the world when the day following his arrival she came in to Mrs. Jasper's to afternoon tea, and merely vouchsafed him a little nod. She sat for twenty minutes, talking incessantly to Edward Jasper, and looking very handsome. Paul Forbes felt himself powerless to combat such indifference; in fact he experienced acute disappointment, and almost lost countenance at this repulse. He had been introduced to Miss Chichester five minutes before, and was standing beside her when Miriam came in. The young girl had struck him as a radiant, candid creature: she met Herbert with an intimate friendly air, and looked at himself with an air of intense curiosity like an expectant child's. In fact, she impressed him as being very youthful, and, to conceal his mortification, he turned to her now, and talked to her with the most perfect ease, without another glance across the room. Miriam felt free to let her own eyes wander, and she saw Forbes and her

pretty friend plainly. He did not lose his coolness, his peculiar repose of manner; but he evidently interested Polly, who stood listening, her eyes full of laughter, and a happy smile on her lips. Until that moment Miriam seemed never to have appreciated the distinctive beauty of the young girl; there was a wonderful soft brilliance on her face, and her hair was of that light wavy golden brown which seems always to have a breeze in it. Miriam tasted her tea, gave the cup to Edward Jasper, took leave of the hostess, and moved across the room to speak to Miss Chichester, just lowering her eyelids as she met Forbes' eyes.

"Polly," she said, "come and drive with me for half an hour."

She spoke with a little imperiousness, and the young girl, who was accustomed to obey, made her adieux hastily, gave a look full of sweetness and gratitude to Paul Forbes, and followed Miriam to the carriage. Edward Jasper attended them. Forbes, indeed, had shrunk from seeming to assert himself. He had come out to the porch, however, and, as the carriage started, Miriam looked back at him. He stood for a moment, gazing after the vanishing equipage, then went into the house. He looked and he felt triumphant. The veiled lighting of Miriam's eyes had reinstated him in his own esteem; he had not, after all, been the dupe of his imagination.

Miriam, meanwhile, had turned to Polly.

"I suppose you had stayed long enough," she

said. "When one has talked a little to people, one is quite ready to go away from these receptions."

"Oh, yes," said Polly. "And you know very well that I am always delighted to come with you."

She smiled back at Miriam caressingly. Yet the truth was that the summons had been an interruption; she could hardly have told what was interrupted, but certainly Mrs. Jasper's little party had been exceedingly pleasant, and she had barely begun to enjoy it. It was fortunate for her that Miriam brought her away in time, she told herself. Left to her own devices, she might have forgotten that one should not stay as long as the pleasure lasted. She still felt excited; her cheeks were a bright rose-color, and her eyes were dilated. She smiled perpetually; in fact, she could have laughed aloud with the joy in life which seemed to have taken possession of her. The carriage was open, and, as they drove rapidly on, she liked the feeling of the cool east wind against her face. The sky was clouding over, and there was a promise of rain. The sun was still almost mid-way up the sky; but half of its fire-colored disk was becoming obscured by the vapors, while from the other half broke angry rays. Here and there was a peaceful region of azure sky, which contrasted with the heavy purplish clouds gathered in the east.

Miriam led Polly on to talk, and found a lively assortment of ideas in the young girl's brain. She did not at first allude to anything she had seen or done that day; but a ceaseless succession of ideas

and fancies, even wishes, had begun to dance through her mind. She had little idea that she was being watched, and was only conscious that Miriam was in a charming mood, ready to listen and lead her on; indeed seemed to be in a state of absolute sympathy and unison of feeling. Polly had been reading a novel which Miriam had lent her; it was not enough to discuss it; the conversations which had amused and stimulated her, she must repeat—not only repeat, but act dramatically. She alluded to something she was making, and it seemed necessary to describe it minutely—not only to describe it, but to twist the carriage-rug into shapes, and realize the result she wanted before the other's eyes. In fact, some social force in Polly, hitherto latent, seemed all at once to have found the exact stimulus it needed.

Miriam had so far repressed her curiosity as to the cause of this sudden prodigality of feeling in Polly; now she determined to satisfy it.

"One can see that you were not bored at Mrs. Jasper's," she remarked. "What was that strange man—that Mr. Forbes,—saying to you, which gave you wings? Is he so brilliant, so witty?"

"Oh, no; not in the least," said Polly. She turned and looked at Miriam with her lovely, frank smile, and with her intense glance, which convinced one on the instant that she was not only absolutely sincere, but warmed all through with ardent feeling. "He was very pleasant; he was simply telling me how to make tea, and how to drink it."

"That does not sound witty or brilliant, certainly."

Polly accepted this as a challenge, and repeated everything which Forbes had said to her. His conversation had not, apparently, been striking. Polly's childlike and naïve delight in his society had been the outcome of her own irrepressible youthfulness and ardor; not the result of any of the witty stranger's flatteries. Miriam's disquietude vanished.

"I do not think Mr. Forbes would bore you, Miriam," Polly said; she had heard nothing of Miriam's meeting him the preceding day and was far from supposing that the two had made a bound into intimacy at the very outset. "Of course, I know that you are bored by a thousand things which are delightful to me, but yet I do believe that you might like him; at least, that you might not dislike him."

"Oh, I do not trouble myself to dislike many people. As to Mr. Forbes, I fancy he is not unlike others. It is easy for him to be pleasant; but these pliant people have to pay the price of their versatility and their sympathy by a lack of faithfulness, of genuineness. How did you like Bertie Jasper?"

"He is an old friend, you know," said Polly. "How can one help liking one's old friends. But, Miriam, do not make up your mind that Mr. Forbes is not genuine."

"My dear child, have I said anything about Mr. Forbes not being genuine? I dare say he is as genuine as I am, as you are. Nobody is genuine. I dare say that to-day when you were going to Mrs. Jasper's, you exclaimed, 'Oh, I do not want to go; I have nothing to say to them.'"

"I did ; how did you know it ? " said Polly, bursting into a peal of laughter. " I had nothing pretty to wear ; and I dreaded it, and longed to stay at home."

"Then you went, and entered smiling, as if you were charmed to go. It is the way we all do. Mr. Forbes, no doubt, thinks in his heart that we are all dull and idealess. He stood by you when I went in, and seemed to be interested in nothing particular ; but all at once he evidently said to himself, ' I must say something to this shy little girl,' and began talking at once."

"That was exactly it," said Polly ; " of course, I knew that he was only talking to me because I happened to be nearest. But actually, Miriam, he seemed not to dislike it."

"Why should he dislike it ? I am sure I love to talk to you — find nothing more delightful."

Polly leaned towards her with a little cry like a bird, and the two almost embraced. Miriam's will had reasserted itself—a will which nothing could restrain, subordinate, or govern, while it was in action, but which, in a fit of mental disgust, she could sink into nothingness. Rather than share Paul Forbes with any one else, she would have run away from the chance of ever seeing him again. She had a momentary idea of saying to Polly, "Happy young creature, with all your life before you, with no faults, no regrets, nothing but aspirations and hopes, do not rob me ! Give me a little chance of being happy." She was too proud to say this, but yet not too proud to be jealous.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MAN OF THE WORLD.

HERE, then, was at last a chance for Paul Forbes to seize the fortune he had hitherto failed to make for himself by the daring *coup* of genius or by industry or calculation. Here he had met a woman with great riches in prospect, but sated, bored, emptied of enthusiasm and hope, who turned to him with expectation and interest; a woman who had beauty of a sort, and, beyond her beauty, possessed for him an attraction as enigmatical as it was charming. If a man could not fall passionately in love with Miriam, he must (so Paul said to himself) be either a lump of spoiled clay or the victim of illusions concerning some other woman. He hoped that he himself was not a lump of spoiled clay, and he knew that, at this present moment, no woman in existence had a shadow of influence over him. We have seen that at times he experienced a certain bitter wrath over his lost chances. He believed in life, and nowadays clearly understood the fact that a man will do well to spend his best thought and purpose in making his life what he wants it to be. In other games, which we may play over and over again, false calculations and a want of sure skill vex us painfully. In the game of life, we rush bunglingly at our only

chance, with no idea that thought, method, and calculation are quite as essential as they are in whist or cricket. Paul had told himself over and over again that his opportunity to make his life complete and significant had gone forever; but he had decided that his will henceforth should be directed by his intelligence; he wanted to make the most of his remnant of power and energy. All at once he found himself in circumstances which seemed not only to give him the opportunity but to impose the duty upon him of ensuring himself a comfortable place in the world. He must at this juncture act like a man of the world, and not like a foolish dreamer. He had not yet met Mrs. Reese, but he had enough to do, at present, in attaching himself to Miriam, and winning her love. He saw very clearly that the girl was not only charming, but imperious and irascible; that she was coquettish, but with the coquetry of the head, not of the heart; that she was capable of being jealous;—but he was not chilled. In fact, he expected to put up with a good deal; and was glad that there was no probability of his taste becoming cloyed by insipid sweetness and perfect symmetry of character.

His success had been tolerably rapid; so rapid that at the end of his first fortnight he was almost certain where he stood with Miriam. His position might have been a little embarrassing, in certain respects, had not his friend Herbert Jasper not only understood him but warmly applauded him for having, from the moment he came to Sycamore Hill,

clearly seen what he wanted, and seized and used the means of getting what he wanted. It argued, to Bertie's perceptions, great force of character and power of will in Paul Forbes, that he had from the outset interested Miriam Reese, and was following up his advantages adroitly—a weak man would have lost time. The two friends did not exchange a word on the subject, but it was easily in Bertie's power to further the love-affair, to guard it from observation—above all, to add zest to Paul's appreciation of his unique good-fortune. He was proud of his friend, and felt quite indifferent to the fact that his brother Edward's chances, poor enough at the beginning, had of late dwindled into nothingness.

Paul had only, so far, left his card at Mrs. Reese's door, and had never seen Miriam in her own house. Still, it was not a difficult matter for him to find her, for she had told him that she regularly walked through the woods, on pleasant days, at twelve o'clock. Accordingly, Paul himself took to walking through the woods at twelve o'clock—and the two met almost invariably. Once she did not appear, and he was anxious; but the following noon he found her in the usual place.

"I was afraid I had driven you away," said he. "I had begun to pack my trunk."

Miriam smiled.

"You have not driven me away, you see," she remarked. "My mother wanted me yesterday to make out a list of guests for a dinner-party."

"Am I to be invited?"

"I directed a card to you just as I came out."

Paul looked eager. "I have wanted to see your handwriting."

She smiled again. "How very absurd! Why should my handwriting be interesting?"

Paul made a gesture, and flung back his head.

"She asks why should her handwriting be interesting to me?" he said, as if addressing an unseen presence. "It occurs to me occasionally," he went on, bending towards her, and speaking impetuously, "that I know very little about you."

"Why should you know very much about me?"

"That I might have to use my imagination less," said Paul.

"You have found out that I have one regular habit;—that I walk here at twelve o'clock."

"I shall have no faith in that hereafter. I know, to my cost, how I felt yesterday as I paced these woods up and down. Everything I had in life seemed to have failed me."

"Don't expect me to believe that you cared."

"Cared?" said Paul. "You don't know,—you don't know," he went on. "I came to Sycamore Hill detached from everything, torn from the past. I had an alien feeling of being outside the world, but at the outset I encountered a new and powerful sensation, which made me indifferent to whatever I had known before." He stopped and looked at her. "Perhaps this seems romantic and ridiculous to you," he added.

"If it did,—it would also be romantic and ridiculous to you, I suppose."

"I am not so easily disenchanted. But I should have to become another man on the instant, and begin to live on quite different thoughts from those which have sustained me the past fortnight."

She gave him a little side glance.

"What are your thoughts?" she demanded, with a sort of austerity.

"I think about you, you see," said Paul, whimsically. "And you, with your looks and your words and your dresses, are an inexhaustible subject. I say within myself, 'What did she mean by saying or doing that?' and it takes time, Miss Reese, it takes time, to study the mystery of such things. Then it occurs to me that I have forgotten how you look, and I shut my eyes in order to call up the image, and, having it before me, I cherish it as a welcome visitant, and keep it with me as long as I can. When I am going to sleep, I have sometimes willed myself to dream of you."

"And did you dream of me?"

"Yes," said Paul, with a bright, stealthy smile.

Miriam refrained from asking him about his dreams. She began, instead, to rally him on not being original, on being like other men, and using phrases.

"Ah," said Paul, "so other men have made love to you! — A woman experiences, no doubt, a certain monotony in it all."

"You speak of men's having made love to me," replied Miriam. "I had at one time a great many offers. That is, my mother wished me to marry, and

it was known that she was willing to settle a good deal of money on me if I married to suit her. But you can hardly imagine that the men who came forward to secure the money made love to me."

She looked at Paul, and he returned her glance with composure.

"Those were men of title," said he. "I have heard that you were at one time engaged to Lord Wedderbourne."

"Yes," said Miriam. She spoke wearily, as if oppressed. He looked at her as she walked on; her cheeks were crimson, and her eyes were unusually brilliant. She wore a broad straw hat, which had slipped back on her head, and, without shading her face, made a rich setting for it. "I treated him badly," she said, in a low voice; "I will not hide it from you; but I do not think I was fair to him. I am a weak creature; there is something in me, at times, stronger than myself. I cannot struggle against it. But I have never repented not marrying that man." She gave a shudder, and all the color went out of her face. "I did not love him; and when I began to mistrust him, I hated him. I should never have believed that he really cared for me, and especially after I discovered . . ." She seemed to shake off the remembrance, as if it were hateful to her. "Sometimes," she went on, in a different manner, and turning to Paul with an almost childlike glance, "sometimes I feel old, very old, as if I had lived through a great deal. Then, again, I seem so

far, to have had nothing, — nothing at all; to be quite at the beginning of things.”

“You are still very young,” said Paul, kindly. “You can begin anew. I can regret nothing that is past — that is, since the experience leaves you free. Still, it is a melancholy reflection that one has a past, yet that one is unable to dwell on it with pleasure. Life ought to be very delightful to you. You are young and untrammelled. In future do not distrust men.”

She had listened to him with rapt attention.

“It is not easy for me to believe,” said she, with a sort of vehemence. “That is, I have a dread of being deceived. To give one’s self, to resign command of one’s fate, and then to find out that one had been played with —”

Paul gave her a simple, direct glance.

“Suppose, as you say,” said he, “that you give yourself — surrender your fate to another — what do you ask in return?”

“That the one — that the one to whom I surrender my happiness shall give me all in return. I want all or nothing — I am jealous of reserves.”

“That sounds fair,” said Paul. “But if you do not grant your absolute faith, do you, after all, surrender everything? Have you no reserves? Do you not break the bond yourself? But naturally you can give much, and it is well for you to put a high value on what you can give — to demand a great deal, — to count on rich returns. I do not blame you,” he went on, “I do not blame you in the least.

Still," he looked at her with a keen glance, "the essential thing for real love is to have its inspiring motive, unselfish and pure. If the initial idea is distrust, the situation is wretched. You have never loved, — I see that you have never loved."

"I never dared to love anybody. Whom have I had to love?" said Miriam, with a sort of passion. "My father and mother never actually cared for me. I have friends — there are Lorraine and Polly — I feel an interest in them, a fondness for them, but I am always conscious that they do not understand me, that they judge me, and very likely remark to each other that Miriam is peculiar and not over-amiable. Were I to die to-morrow, they would not suffer. At times I have become absorbed in music; I have played Beethoven and Schumann day after day and night after night. I have felt a rest and satisfaction which were almost religious; the whole secret of life seemed open to me. Yet, after living on these ecstasies for a while, I would suddenly wake up some morning with all the illusion gone; the very idea of a bar of music inspired aversion; — I longed for something more complete and satisfying. I have had the same experience with books. Reading enchants me for a time; then I ask myself, 'What does it all matter?' Nothing of it all is mine! In fact, books are a pleasant pastime; but I cannot live on the mirage of a real life which is all they have to offer." She turned to him suddenly, and there was something bewildering in the half-wildness of her glance, the soft melancholy of her smile, and the

shadows of her meaning in her face. "I suppose you think me an egotist," she exclaimed, "and will tell me that to love I must give all, sacrifice everything, demand nothing."

"Yes, that is exactly it. You must give all, sacrifice everything, demand nothing. And you can, and you will. You will begin then and be happy. Experiment on me," he said, with a little gesture. "Hitherto, you have distrusted people whose disinterestedness you could hardly question. Everything about me is questionable, so that it will cost you all your woman's faith, all your generosity, to believe in me at the outset."

"Oh, I believe in you," said Miriam, with an arch manner. "I believed in you the first moment I saw you."

The blood rushed to Paul's face; he made a step forward; then by a visible effort he restrained himself.

"That was a friendly speech," said he, looking at her with a peculiar sweetness of glance. "I dare not tell you how much it makes me hope." Their talk had never before been as personal as this, and it had had this effect upon Paul to make him relinquish his idea of winning Miriam adroitly, as a clever man of the world would have done. In fact, it began to seem an incredible thing to him that he should ever become a man of the world.

CHAPTER IX.

POLLY.

It was Miriam Reese's habit to go to the Rectory every morning and sit for a while with Polly, while she pursued her daily avocations, teaching her little brothers and sisters, sewing, or cooking. Miriam liked sometimes to help, and sometimes to hinder; at any rate, she contrived to infuse an element into Polly's existence which lifted the burden, and gave everything a purpose and meaning.

Nobody in the world had ever been so kind to Polly as Miriam, and hers was a grateful soul. Affection and intimacy had given her, perhaps, a deeper insight into Miriam's character than any one else possessed; she believed in her absolute generosity; she understood the passionate, ardent heart — a heart at once tender and cruel, but cruel only with a cruelty which came from the tenderness of which it was half ashamed. When Miriam was silent and reserved, Polly accepted her indifferent mood; she bore as well the passing caprice of the moment, the cold ironic look which froze her to the soul; she had patience with this Miriam, and waited for the other to come back. With all Miriam's faults, Polly believed that there was a noble love of truth in her nature, and that, if she was hard and

exigent, it was only that she felt her life to be a mockery, a foolish pageant, compared with the real existence, full of hope and vitality, to which she felt herself entitled. When Miriam should finally love somebody, and be loved in return, then, Polly felt, in the twinkling of an eye, she would put away from herself all the dark side of her nature, which filled her at present with endless regrets, jealousies, and petty miseries. As to who and what this man should be who would at once change the world for Miriam, Polly had many romantic fancies; her insight failed her here. In fact, from the first moment Polly met Paul Forbes, she was so walled round with her own illusions that she forgot to look further. She claimed nothing, hoped nothing, expected nothing for herself, but vaguely saw the world about her in a diaphanous and roseate mist. The real charm lay in the surprise she felt at the unexpectedness and novelty of existence.

Two days before Mrs. Reese's dinner-party was to take place, Miriam had walked down the avenue, passing along beyond the Jaspers' and Redmonds', turned into the side gate of St. John's Church, skirted the grounds, and gone through the garden to the Rectory. She directed her steps first to the summer-house on the lawn, which was used as a school-room on pleasant days, and here she found three children making a pretence of studying, but actually watching a nest of young Phœbe-birds in the honeysuckles, which the mother-bird was feeding.

"They are all out of the egg now," Robert re-

marked to Miriam, in a business-like way, as if he had been responsible for the operation. "The last one came out yesterday afternoon. It's hard to tell what she feeds them with, but I guess it's flies."

"How many are there?" asked Miriam.

"Four!" whispered Lucy, with round eyes. "Papa lifted me up, and I saw them."

"Don't make the old birds miserable by watching them," said Miriam. "How do you suppose you should like it if three great giants came into the garden and sat down staring at you, commenting on your actions and your appearance? You would consider such an intrusion abominable."

"I shouldn't," said Tom, dryly. "I'd like it of all things. Three giants — what fun!"

Miriam did not debate the point. "Where is your sister?" she asked.

"Sister's making a cream-cake for tea," said little Lucy. "She is in the laundry."

Miriam took her way to the disused laundry — a cool nook, with windows looking upon a green yard, with a background of wall run over with roses and honeysuckles. Polly's voice was heard, as she advanced, humming a strain from one of her favorite songs,—

"Sleep well, sleep well, and let thy lovely eyelids close!"

The final words, "Let thy lovely eyelids close," she repeated over and over, each time with a tenderer cadence.

"Whose lovely eyelids?" demanded Miriam,

standing in the doorway, and taking in the effect of the scene. Polly was sifting flour, as she stood leaning over a table, her figure defined against the outside greenery, which the open window disclosed. She had on a white print frock spotted with rosebuds, and this was well covered by a white apron, which came up to the neck, like a child's pinafore. "Oh, you delicious creature!" Miriam remarked, going up to her and kissing the round cheek.

"Oh, you,—what shall I call you?—you white-winged angel!" Polly replied, with a smile, and a look full of warmth and charm. "I am so glad to see you! I had hoped you would come. I have all sorts of things to do. Papa has an old friend here, and wants everything to be nice. I have this cake to make, a pudding, and croquettes and a salad to oversee. And yet, the day is so charming, I long to be out-of-doors. My thoughts fly about; I think of everything I ought to forget, and forget everything I ought to remember. I have constantly to say to myself, 'the yolks of four eggs, the whites of two, two cups of sugar,' and so on. For it is all the time vanishing clean out of my remembrance. Sit down over there. I must be careful not to spot your pretty dress."

Miriam knew the resources of the place very well, and sat down in a well scoured wooden chair. She felt in excellent spirits, and was quite in a mood to take joy in looking at Polly, who was positively radiant with the color and tints which belong to nineteen. Her golden-brown hair was full of sun-

light and breeze ; and the way the little locks curled about the forehead and temples was something to watch and wonder over. She had everything in shining order before her,—a basket of eggs, a pan of milk, bowls of carefully measured flour, implements of all sorts ready to her hand.

“Let me see,” she exclaimed, tapping her forehead with one finger, “the yolks of four eggs, the whites of two.” She broke the eggs carefully into two dishes, set the whites aside, and with the skill of an expert began to beat the yolks, advancing towards Miriam and smiling at her. “It is so hard to keep one’s whole mind on one’s work,” she observed.

“I would not give my work my whole mind,” said Miriam. “I should think a little corner of it might do. Mrs. Somerville used to solve her mathematical problems while she went about her housekeeping in the morning.”

“Oh, I could manage mathematical problems easily enough. My difficulties are deeper than that. I have to decide whether to wear my new white mull to your house and keep my blue for Mrs. Jasper’s, or to wear my blue for your dinner-party and reserve the mull.”

“Wear the mull to our dinner, by all means. I like you best of all in white.”

“That was what I wanted to do ;— but the blue is perhaps a little handsomer, although I have worn it forever and forever — and it was one of mamma’s old dresses, to begin with. Well, that is settled ; but there are so many other things. I have so many

ideas, positively I am surprised at my own ingenuity. Don't you remember that I told you my old white muslin was so shrunken, — or else that I had grown so large, — I could not make it meet. Now, don't you think that if I put in a frill of lace on both sides — not having it exactly open, you know, but still not entirely closed — ”

“That would do very well. I have some yards of lace which would be the very thing for it, and I will give it to you. Have you not beaten those four eggs sufficiently ? ”

“Dear, dear, yes! Yolks of four eggs, whites of two, two cups of fine sugar. Do you know, it quite excites me to think about your dinner-party, Miriam. Twenty-four guests, — I never went to such a dinner before.”

“Twenty-one guests, — we three make twenty-four,” said Miriam. “My mother is very cross about it all; — I don't believe you will have too good a dinner. I told her something must be done for the Jaspers, for all the neighborhood is so excited about this mysterious guest of Bertie's.”

“Do you mean Mr. Forbes? I don't believe you like Mr. Forbes, Miriam. And yet, he is simple and natural, and always has something interesting to say.”

“My mother dislikes him, — that is, she dislikes the idea of him,” said Miriam. “But I hope she may not be rude to him when he comes. I have been arranging the seats, and I have put him far out of her sight.”

"Whom is he to take in?" demanded Polly, with a soft eagerness.

"One of the Redmonds," Miriam replied. She studied Polly's face as she spoke, and saw no change in the brightness of it. Indeed, Polly had nursed no dreams of being taken in by Mr. Paul Forbes, — her bliss at the idea of the dinner-party was quite independent of any honors for herself. "I suppose," Miriam went on, "that you will be very well contented to have Trowbridge Archibald sit by you."

"Contented!" exclaimed Polly. "Of course, I shall be more than contented — I shall be delighted!" She hardly knew what it was that she was saying, and had only a sense of being grateful that anybody should take the pains to apportion a young man to her; a young man, when most of the men were to be old. She would not, at any rate, have refused Miriam the satisfaction of feeling that any of her plans were agreeable.

"Trowbridge Archibald is well worth being polite to," said Miriam. "And, Polly, he knows that he is to sit by you, and he is enormously pleased at the idea of it. He told me confidentially yesterday that he thought you were the prettiest girl in Philadelphia."

The color rushed to Polly's face.

"The prettiest girl in Philadelphia. Oh, oh, oh!" she exclaimed, in a piercing tone. "Oh, that is too much to believe!"

"Yes," said Miriam, laughing slightly, "that is too much to believe. Probably every man in Phila-

delphia of Mr. Archibald's age has the same opinion of some fair young creature; accordingly, as incontestable abstract fact, one accepts these statements with a certain reserve. But it serves to define Mr. Archibald's position towards you."

Polly gave Miriam a shy glance, and seemed on the point of answering; but some thought frustrated expression, and held in leash the words that she wished to utter.

"Mr. Archibald is very rich, Polly," pursued Miriam.

"Don't talk about Mr. Archibald, — please don't talk in that way about any one," murmured Polly, and her face took on an expression almost of alarm.

"No, I will not, — but, Polly, I want you to be rich, — you know, I like you, — I adore you in that chintz, — but I am always thinking that you would make a beautiful aristocrat, — I can imagine you in velvet and lace, — I —"

"Don't, Miriam! don't!" Polly exclaimed, with an air of intense seriousness. "You know that I am so happy, so lucky already, that it sometimes almost frightens me. When I say my prayers, I ask all the time that I may not forget, — may not grow careless of being good. Everything is so pleasant, — all the world is so good to me, — beyond every one else, you are so good to me! I think so much already about what I like, and what becomes me, that I am terrified sometimes at my foolishness and vanity. It makes it so hard for me to remember what I need to remember."

“For example?”

“For example, this cake. It seems almost impossible for me to keep my mind on making it. What is it after the eggs? Oh, what can it be! Oh, two cups of flour, with two teaspoonfuls of baking-powder. It is so ungrateful and so heartless for me to forget my duties — my closest and nearest duties — because I am having a good time. Yet how can I help it? The moment I am by myself, and, as it were, return to myself, all sorts of memories come up so fresh and vivid. People say such delightful things, I know it is foolish to mind; but, somehow, I do mind, and they go over and over in my head and put everything else out.”

“What delightful things do you mean? Mr. Archibald’s compliment, for instance?”

“I dare say,” murmured Polly, politely, “that I shall think of that by and by, but I have not dared to remember it yet. But let me tell you about last evening. Everybody was out, you know — papa had taken the boys and all the children with him when he went to Dudley. I should have gone over to see you, but Lorraine had promised to come to tea. But she did not; I waited, and went about and about the empty house, and into the garden. I picked roses, and dressed the tea-table, and put a bunch in my belt and another at my throat. And I looked at myself in all the mirrors — in fact, I behaved oh, so foolishly! I went in the kitchen and talked to Katie; I stayed there till she sent me away. I ate my meal by myself, for Lorraine

had not come ; and if I had been restless before tea, I was a thousand times more restless afterwards. There seemed to be a thousand voices calling me, urging me, compelling me. I took my work, but I could not work ; and I tried to write a letter, but I could not get beyond the first line. Then all at once it came to my mind that I might sing all my songs through. I got them all out and sang them one by one ; and it seemed to me that those songs came from my very soul. I think you would have opened your eyes, Miriam, if you had heard me sing, for it was as if I had wings and soared and floated, and all the limits of every-day life were removed. Everything seemed clear before me ; and yet never before had I so felt the charm and mystery of everything. And the songs were so sweet—so sweet their music seemed to pierce into my very heart. Do birds ever sing themselves to death ? That was the way I felt—as if I were a nightingale, and could die upon the strain.”

Miriam looked at Polly with an admiring but ironic glance. She was whisking her golden batter with a spoon, never pausing for an instant, but putting a frantic energy into her steady beats.

“That all sounds very poetic,” Miriam remarked, although she was in reality sympathetic and interested, “but I am sure that cake is ready to go into the oven.”

“It is ; I was just going to put it in. There, now ! But I have not finished yet about my singing. I went on and on ; I used up all the songs I loved,—

some of them I sang twice over,—and yet I could not be satisfied. I felt all the time a deeper and a deeper thirst for something more melodious still, with sweeter and deeper meanings; so I got out the book of songs you gave me. I opened at what you called the song of songs—the ‘Adelaide.’ Was I not ambitious? I could not really play the accompaniment; only indicate it, as it were. But I sang it—that is, I let myself go. It seemed to content me, at last, to say, over and over, ‘Adelaide, Adelaide.’”

She stopped and looked at Miriam. There was a burning fire in her eyes, but she had grown pale.

“All at once,” she continued, “I seemed to feel somebody near me. I turned, and who do you suppose was standing at the window, listening?”

A shadow had flitted across Miriam’s face.

“I suppose it was not your father,” she remarked. “You would not have described it all in that intense way if it had been your father.”

“No, indeed,” said Polly; “it was Mr. Forbes. It turned out that he had rung at the door, inquired for papa, and, having learned that he was not at home, was going away, and was crossing the lawn to the side gate. Then, hearing me, he came to the open window.”

“And what did he say about your singing?” Miriam asked, with some slight constraint.

“He said I sang most things very well,” Polly answered in triumph; “that I had a bird-like voice. But then he added, ‘The idea of a child like you

attempting that man's song! No woman could sing it. It's absurd!" Polly stopped to laugh. Her color had come back. There was a tender, bright flush on her face, and she was in the everyday world again, stirring her pudding.

"And did he go away then?" asked Miriam. "After taking all the conceit out of you like that, did he say good-night and vanish on the instant?"

"Not on the instant," said Polly; "but yet he did not stay long. I asked him to come in at the door and sit down; but no, he remarked, he would do that some other time. But he talked about songs; he seems to know about all the songs that ever were written. What does he not know, indeed? I suppose it is because he is bright and artistic, alive to everything, and seeing whatever passes. And I always seem to understand everything he says as if by magic."

Miriam had risen; there was something in her face and in the very half-shrug of her shoulders which seemed to call out with an accusing voice, and Polly was full of repentance.

"Oh," she murmured, running to the elder girl, and caressing her, "I have bored you talking about Mr. Forbes."

"Oh, not at all," Miriam answered, coolly. "I hope you do not think too much of Mr. Forbes. That would be very foolish."

The pure glow on the young girl's face — the dim reflection from the soul within — seemed to disclose something to Miriam.

"Half of what you say," she went on, "is silly, and the other half is natural and good. You do not meet a great many people who operate upon your higher sympathies. Mr. Forbes is clever, and he is exceedingly good-natured; that is, he is a stranger here, and he is curious about us, and interested in all he meets."

"Yes, that is it," said Polly, with an air of conviction. "Of course I knew it was that—he did not really care about my singing."

Polly was singing softly to herself five minutes later. Miriam had gone, and surely there could be no harm in letting one's thoughts go back with a fond persistence to a pretty scene. No moment in all her life had been so poetic, so filled with story-book glamour and romance as that when she turned and saw Mr. Forbes in the window, the light shining on his face. Who would forget willingly an event like that? In fact, Polly could not remember it half clearly enough, and was perpetually searching her memory for some trifle with which to fill out every detail of the little picture.

CHAPTER X.

A SPIRITUALISTIC SÉANCE.

PAUL FORBES had been more than a fortnight at Sycamore Hill before he enjoyed the honor of an introduction to Mrs. Reese. Yet we have seen that he had made great advances in his acquaintance with Miriam. They had, in fact, reached a degree of intimacy which gave them nowadays an equal consciousness that it was better to meet where they were not likely to attract observation and comment. Paul had not declared himself Miriam's lover, in so many words; but he had more than once shown a fervor, a recklessness, a willingness to rest his claims to happiness on what she might allot to him, which pierced all conventionalities, and aimed at sensibilities in the girl's nature which had never hitherto been touched. Miriam, it is true, avoided these deep rifts in the surface of their easy and pleasant intercourse, but she had never made him feel that he was laying himself open to disappointment and rebuff. The experience was full of charm to Paul—here was a beautiful and fastidious woman who had singled him out and included him, and him only, in a charming freak of almost passionate curiosity. She had made all sorts of opportunities to see him; she had lured him into talk, and listened to him day after day with brilliant

eyes and an insatiable inquisitiveness. It was as if she wanted to know him thoroughly before she began to experiment on him. Paul was willing enough to pour himself out in narrative, criticism, and discussion. He had never had such an auditor before, and was conscious of enjoying the visible effect of his own cleverness. He, so far, stood on equal terms with Miriam. He was a clever and elegant man, in pursuit of a beautiful girl who had made coquettish advances to him. He wore a manner of absolute composure before others, but with her he carried himself in a different way. There was, in short, no lack of piquancy in their present degree of intimacy; every look, every word, had its meaning; and what was left unlooked and unsaid was more eloquent still. Frequently the two would be a whole day or evening in each other's company without exchanging a word or glance. At such times it was a matter of indifference to both to whom they talked, but they were sure to talk with animation. It was apt to be Edward Jasper to whom Miriam turned, while Paul Forbes almost invariably drifted to Miss Chichester. It was a happy accident to Paul at such times that Polly served his turn so well — that he could look at her with delight, and talk and listen to her with immeasurable ease. He seemed always to have known her, and in her presence effort and discrimination were unnecessary. In Miriam's society he seemed, on the contrary, in a strange atmosphere; he was excited; he had to make an effort to give his narra-

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tives true color, to speak with exactness and accuracy; he felt and remembered everything in a hysterical or an exaggerated way. At times he talked vaguely and mystically; but Miriam invariably listened with eager attention. To see him moved gave him an irresistible fascination for her.

But we have said before of Paul that late at night and early in the morning he had the bad habit of examining himself closely, the scales of flattering illusions dropping off his eyes. At such times he wondered what degree of strength there might be in the link which bound him to Miriam, and what this significant and charming relation was likely to develop into.

"You do not know my mother yet," Miriam had more than once remarked to him, and she had often followed up this allusion by telling him, with astonishing candor, all sorts of damaging facts and anecdotes relating to the great lady. She had also told Forbes with equal unreserve that her mother was not likely ever to consent to her marriage with any one she did not herself bring forward as a suitor. Paul had not yet reached a point where he counted with absolute assurance on being Mrs. Reese's son-in-law, — a son-in-law, too, after her own heart, — and this remark took the edge off his eagerness a little. Still, he was not without anxiety concerning the impression he should make upon the mother of Miriam, and he was at last presented to her at the Redmonds', on the occasion of Nora's spiritualistic séance.

It was not often that Mrs. Reese consented to

abate her grandeur and accept her neighbors' hospitalities ; but on this occasion she had promised to be present, and, after keeping the circle waiting for an hour, she swept into the room at nine o'clock in a cream-colored brocade, which trailed yards behind her. She was attended, at a safe distance, by Miriam, and followed by Mr. Reese, who picked his steps in a dejected and unhappy manner, trying to avoid entanglement with his wife's train.

"It has not begun, has it?" Mrs. Reese demanded, with her habitual abruptness. "Although I so rarely go out, both Mr. Reese and Miriam seemed to throw every impediment in my way. I thought I should never get here. Oh, are you the medium?" she exclaimed, putting up her eye-glasses as Mr. Titus was presented to her.

Mr. Titus, a man with a dark, powerful face and a well developed muscular frame, bowed. He looked a little fierce, and had for the past half-hour showed some exasperation ; but Miss Redmond had taken pains to impress him with the fact of Mrs. Reese's importance ;—and, although we are taught that our heavenly heritage is likely to be in an inverse ratio to the amount of our earthly possessions, Mr. Titus had mentally conceded that even the spirits might find it worth their while to wait for so rich a lady.

"No ; we have not begun, Mrs. Reese," said Nora. "We have all been holding our breaths and waiting for you. You are acquainted with everybody here, of course. There are just thirteen of us ; shall we—"

"I don't know that gentleman," said Mrs. Reese, waving her fan towards Paul Forbes. "I never saw him before."

"Dear me! Mr. Forbes, let me present you to Mrs. Reese," said Mr. Redmond. "I had no idea! Why, this is Herbert Jasper's friend, dear madam,—he has been here for some time. Mrs. Reese, Mr. Forbes."

"I never heard of him. I had no idea there was such a person," declared Mrs. Reese. Paul had advanced, made his bow, and now stood before her. "I cannot understand," she went on, taking him into her confidence at once, "I cannot understand why no one has mentioned your name to me."

"I am most happy in being brought to your attention at last," said Paul. "I confess I have heard a great deal about you, and I have seen you."

"Where?" demanded the great lady.

"In church," responded Paul. "Then, you have passed me in your carriage."

"The idea!" said Mrs. Reese, smiling with self-importance. "Miriam, have you met Mr. Forbes?"

"Yes," said Miriam, meekly; "I have had that pleasure."

"And never said a word! And to think of the people and things you do talk about! Have you met Mr. Reese, Mr. Forbes?" she pursued, and, looking behind her, she called, "Frederick, I want to introduce you to Mr. Forbes."

These two men had encountered before, but shook hands again at this encouragement. "When are you

going away?" the great lady inquired of Paul, who had evidently fired her imagination by his good looks or his graceful manner.

"I hope you will not insist on my going away at once," said Paul.

"On the contrary," replied Mrs. Reese, "I hope you will stay always. We need somebody like you at Sycamore Hill. Society here is so tame and mediocre."

"It has not been so since I came," said Paul. "Of course I cannot say what it was before that, but I assure you, nowadays, society here impresses me as interesting in the extreme."

"And Miriam never told me!" said Mrs. Reese.

Nora was impatient of any further delays, and was marshalling the guests. "Into the music-room, — into the music room," she was calling to the scattered groups. "The séance is to be held in the music-room." Mr. Forbes, perhaps you will bring Mrs. Reese."

Paul offered his arm to the lady, and his air pleased her.

"I am glad I came," said she. "I rarely go out; most people bore me. I myself am a cosmopolitan, and Sycamore Hill is suburban. You are a cosmopolitan, Mr. Forbes, — I see that. I should know it from the way you tie your cravat. Tell me that you are a cosmopolitan."

"I regret to say I have been a dweller in many cities," said Paul, "but I never succeeded in becoming a cosmopolitan. I love just a few people and a

few small things. My tastes are almost parochial."

"You may say that," said Mrs. Reese, "but I know it is a joke. As I said, there is something cosmopolitan in your very neck-tie—you look as if you had lived everywhere in Europe—your smile shows it. A man like you could never live in obscurity."

They had reached the threshold of the music-room, and Mrs. Reese now paused and surveyed the scene with curiosity. The piano was pushed into the alcove, and the end of the narrow, oblong apartment was enclosed behind a dark baize curtain. "I had quite forgotten what we came for," said she. "You put the spirits out of my head, Mr. Forbes. Do you suppose they are behind that curtain? Can anybody peep inside that place, Mr. — what is that medium's name?"

"My name is Titus, — I wish you to examine the curtain. Go behind it, handle the simple instruments, which are tangible to eye and touch, satisfy yourself in any way concerning the agents I have chosen to aid our unseen friends in their manifestations," said the medium, with a lofty air.

Mrs. Reese hung back a little. "Why don't you open the curtain?" she inquired of her husband, with some asperity. "Don't you hear what the medium says?"

Mr. Reese and Paul Forbes simultaneously started forward, and drew back the hangings, and Miriam led her mother inside. "Don't be afraid," she said,

observing some trepidation in Mrs. Reese. "There is nothing here except a small table, — a very light one, —" she added, lifting it, "a chair, and a banjo lying on the chair."

"There are trap-doors and pulleys, and a cabinet with a ladder somewhere," declared Mrs. Reese. "They come down on ladders from holes in the wall."

"There are *no* pulleys, *no* trap-doors, — *no* ladders, *no* holes in the wall," asseverated Mr. Titus. "You are in plain sight, madam, of all the adjuncts and aids, if they may be called adjuncts and aids, which the unseen presences require in order to make themselves manifest to our crude and rudimentary perceptions."

"But why a banjo?" inquired Mrs. Reese, peremptorily.

"And when the heavenly host are all handsomely equipped with harps and all that," put in Edward Jasper. "I agree with you, Mrs. Reese, why a banjo?"

"I deprecate this spirit of levity," said Mr. Titus. "If there are sceptics here, I request them at least to abstain from remarks and allusions which will have the effect of rendering all my mediation nugatory. It is not my province to make explanations. I impose but one condition, ladies and gentlemen, which is that there shall be a candid and expectant attitude throughout the 'seeance, — a postponement of comment and criticism until you shall see some manifestations on which to form a reasonable opinion."

"That is just, — entirely just," Mr. Redmond hastened to say. "We shall hold your wishes in absolute respect."

"Absolute respect," affirmed Dr. Jasper, shaking his head at Edward.

"There are many grades of spiritual existences," Mr. Titus now observed. "Some easily accessible; others more exclusive, more remote, more reluctant. Communication with the higher is, however, apt to be made through intermediate and easily responsive spirits whose inchoate attempts at expression are sometimes best assisted by a banjo."

The banjo was looked at by the whole group with awe and expectation.

"If this inspection has been satisfactory," the medium proceeded, "I should like to construct a battery." He looked about him. "I wish to choose two persons, one of each sex," he went on, scanning one person after another with a deliberate glance. "I select Mrs. Reese and that young man," said he, signifying Mr. Herbert Jasper.

"I beg to be excused," said Bertie, on the instant. "I decline absolutely, with many thanks all the same."

"He wants me!" murmured Mrs. Reese. "He wants me. What am I to do?" she inquired of everybody, agitated by conflicting emotions of curiosity and dread. "I am not sure I could do it. And I could not possibly endure to be frightened. I never could endure to be frightened; could I?" she said, to her husband naïvely.

"The spirits are more likely to be frightened," retorted Mr. Reese, trying to assume a jocular air.

"The spirits frightened? Not at all,—not at all," said Mrs. Reese. "Mr. Titus, I insist upon belonging to the battery, and if you need somebody else, take Mr. Forbes. Mr. Forbes, you will come, I am sure. You will not desert me," and Mrs. Reese wore an air of almost tender entreaty.

Mr. Titus was of the same mind, and Mr. Forbes had no particular objection to serve on the battery. He had not had a glance from Miriam since she came in, and he began to wonder how she was impressed by his instant success with her mother. He was, indeed, quite ready to admire Mrs. Reese: she was handsome and well preserved; she was magnificent in attire, and she was certainly friendly. Every one was friendly at Sycamore Hill; but Mrs. Reese took possession of him, as it were. He yielded, offered his arm again, and led the lady forward. Three chairs were arranged in front of the drawn curtain, and Forbes was requested to take the one at the right, Mrs. Reese was placed in the middle, and Mr. Titus sat on the left. Each was directed to bare the arm half way up. Mrs. Reese's sleeves were well adapted for the purpose, as they ended at the elbow, with a fall of lace. She had only to remove her bracelets. Mr. Titus now grasped her wrist with his two strong hands while she fastened her clasp upon Paul Forbes. A second and shorter curtain was stretched before the other,—which completely enveloped the "battery," allowing only the heads of

three to emerge. The lights were extinguished, but one glimmer of gas; music was asked for, and Madeline Redmond, going to the piano, softly began Beethoven's Spirit Waltz. The audience had settled themselves into two rows of arm-chairs facing the battery, and there was a breathless hush of expectation. Finding the Spirit Waltz ineffective as an invocation, after repeating it two or three times, Madeline took up various funeral marches, evidently supposing them to have powerful associations for departed spirits, — trying the Dead March in 'Saul,' and, as a final resource, Von Weber's Last Waltz. Finding all to no purpose, she was beginning Chopin's Raindrop Prelude when Mr. Titus' assistant suddenly made a suggestion that the music might be of too high an order, going on to say, —

"Indian Bill is apt to be the most responsive spirit, and he likes 'Yankee Doodle' or something lively."

Madeline struck joyfully into "Yankee Doodle," which instantly summoned invisible agencies into animated communications. The banjo from behind the curtain gave forth a violent twang, a chair was knocked over, loud rappings were heard simultaneously from several points, and, as a climax, Mrs. Reese uttered a piercing shriek.

"If this is 'Indian Bill,'" exclaimed Paul Forbes, "I have got hold of him."

Even in the dim light there were signs of a scuffle under the battery curtain; then Mr. Titus' voice, remulous with indignation, was heard.

"I protest against these timid, these impertinent interruptions. This is not a juggler's performance. If the gentleman who has accepted a place in this battery has not the courage nor the magnanimity to bear a few playful demonstrations, the séance may as well break up at once."

Forbes was laughing, but he muttered apologies.

"Proceed," said he, "proceed; I will not interrupt again, no matter what happens."

"They may not return," said Mr. Titus, sadly; and for a time it seemed as if the spell had been too rudely broken. All was depressingly silent; then a soft note from the banjo proclaimed that the spiritual visitants were still within reach. Currents of cooler air crossed and recrossed the room; invisible wings seemed to be fanning the group; faint gleams of blue light appeared in unexpected places, and, as if to define the meaning of these phenomena, three startling loud knocks were now heard.

"I am so glad!" cried Nora Redmond. "That means that the spirits are willing to communicate."

Mr. Titus assented. Each might write a question on a bit of paper, fold the paper, and drop it on the table inside the curtain; and most of the audience at once assailed the universe with their special problems which defied solution. Some audible questions were asked, and received divers knocks in response. The spirits of Indian Bill, Shakspeare, and William Penn were discovered to be in attendance. Mr. Reese, although much agitated at the idea of putting a question to the author of "Hamlet," contrived to

k if the great master were interested in the investigations of the Sycamore Hill Shakspeare Society. In answer to this came an emphatic rap, which caused some consternation in Mr. Reese's soul; but, after a momentary pause, it was followed by another, and then another, and then another, which were translated as the expression of an almost ecstatic approbation on the part of Shakspeare. All this was interspersed with banjo discords, and the noise of the table and chair banged against floor and wall. At last sheets of paper began to fly about the room. Mr. Titus's assistant announced that the "séance" was over. The battery was released, and the lights were rekindled. Mr. Titus bore signs of having had a sharp tussle with his unseen auxiliaries. His face was purple, the veins in his neck swollen, and his hair was dishevelled.

Mrs. Reese turned eagerly to Paul Forbes.

"I could never have stood it unless you had been there beside me," she said with effusion. "I was so grateful to you!"

"Rather an eerie experience!"

"Look at my arm," whispered Mrs. Reese. "I was sure it would be black and blue, and it is black and blue. I am afraid of that medium. It was no flesh and blood that had hold of me."

The plump arm indeed looked as if it had been manacled with iron.

"Come, now," said Paul, "you were brave. To bear all that was not so easy."

"It hurt me cruelly," said Mrs. Reese. "If it

had not been for you — ; and then when that hand came, which you caught away — ”

“ It is just as well to say nothing about that,” said Paul. “ But was it not — ” and he whispered the remainder of the sentence. Mrs. Reese murmured something in return, took his arm, led him to a distance, and poured into his ear a full recital of all her pent-up emotions. She disclosed her suspicions and declared her convictions. It was not often that the great lady could talk freely to a sympathetic listener, and she made the most of her opportunity. After a while her experiences of the evening began to merge into the broader relations of life. She had found Paul Forbes so satisfactory on this occasion, that she cast about for better opportunities to see him and be seen of him. It suddenly occurred to her that she was to have a dinner-party the following evening. “ I wonder,” she exclaimed, “ if you are invited to my house to-morrow night, Mr. Forbes ? ”

“ I had a card for the dinner,” responded Paul. “ I was very much honored. Of course I accepted. Still, I should like an invitation from you, now that I have had the pleasure of meeting you.”

“ Oh, I want you to come,” said Mrs. Reese. “ You must come. You must sit by me.”

“ That would be too much happiness.”

“ What have you been doing here ? ” questioned Mrs. Reese, with an air of disdain. “ I had observed that all the Sycamore Hill people were sending out invitations. They have no pity ; they devise the most atrocious affairs ; they don’t begin to imagine *what one is used to.*”

"I am used to so little," murmured Paul, "I have found it all very pleasant."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Reese. "A man with your way of offering your arm has not spent his life going out to tea-parties. I'll try to make it worth your while to come to-morrow night. Say you will come."

"Oh, I promise—I promise with all my heart," said Paul, who felt as if he were assisting in a light comedy.

At the conclusion of the séance, Lorraine Redmond had withdrawn to the library to her work, which was at the moment fastening labels on some fossil specimens she had been collecting. Herbert Jasper had followed her, much to her surprise, and had worn out her scanty stock of patience by standing about in elegant attitudes which displayed the advantages of his figure in evening dress. "As if it were a party!" Lorraine said to herself, indignantly. And she could not help feeling oppressed by his steady gaze.

"I have something to do," she remarked, pointedly, "but I had no intention of withdrawing any of my sister's guests from the other room."

"I've no sympathy with that sort of thing," said Bertie. "I'm delighted to be out of it."

"I have never yet seen you in sympathy with anything," remarked Lorraine, with a toss of her blonde head.

"Oh, I say! I'm not so bad as that! Come, now, did you yourself believe that anything went on to-

night which the medium or his assistant had not a hand in."

"I believe in nothing that I cannot test by my own senses," said Lorraine. "I must see, touch, and feel, before I give credence to any unexplained phenomena."

"Yes, I know," murmured Bertie, and he gave her a side glance from his handsome dark eyes.

"What does he know?" thought Lorraine, a little disturbed. She stirred uneasily in her chair, and her brilliant glance surveyed Herbert, who reddened slightly, feeling that perhaps she read his thoughts. He had never for a moment forgotten what had occurred at their first interview, and he had been meditating his revenge ever since. She had done her best to make him remember it. She habitually looked over him, down at him; she counted him out persistently on occasions which required any display of force and energy, and only mentioned him when there was an opportunity for ease and self-indulgence. He had bided his time, but said to himself to-night that his hour had come.

"If you insist on staying here," Lorraine now observed, "you may as well make yourself useful."

"With all my heart," returned Bertie, approaching her with alacrity. "Please give me something to do."

"You might put these specimens on the third shelf of that cabinet."

He took one in his hand. "I beg pardon," said he, dropping it with a fastidious air; "they are extremely sticky."

“It is nothing but gum-tragacanth.”

He took his cambric handkerchief, wrapped the specimens in it, carried them to the cabinet, and then walked slowly back to Lorraine, whose pretty little face was raised towards him with an ironic smile. He saw that smile, and it nerved him for the ordeal. He stooped, swift as a bee to the heart of a flower, and kissed her. It was very neatly and effectively done; nimbly too, and, above all, so unexpectedly, that Lorraine may be forgiven for feeling at first only an intense surprise that postponed her realization of the sacrilege. She gazed back at him frightened, gradually kindling into a vague wrath.

“You, — you kissed me!” she exclaimed, struggling for words which should give expression to the conflict of soul within her, and finding nothing so eloquent as the bare statement of the outrage.

“Yes, I know I did,” said Herbert, in his gentlest manner.

She had been pale, but now began to pulse into color. “How could you — how — how — why — why, — I assure you! What, —” She tried to link this abominable action to some cause, to supply a logical sequence, something to make it less perplexing.

“Nobody ever did such a thing before,” she finally exclaimed. “Never.”

“I am very glad to hear you say that,” said Bertie, with feeling.

Lorraine’s agitation grew. “Oh, I am so angry, — I am furious!” she cried, wondering why every-

thing she tried to utter became so feeble and pointless. "I should like to —"

"Don't," murmured Bertie, softly, "don't, don't be so vexed. You see, I—I just wanted to feel certain whether you were made of, of—Sèvres porcelain," he added, demurely.

"Of Sèvres porcelain," repeated Lorraine, incredulously, the words rankling, and seeming to bring up some suggestion. All at once she remembered her own speech to him. "Oh, I begin to understand," she went on, growing haughty, "I comprehend. This was a revenge,—a mean-spirited, masculine revenge."

Bertie, half-proud, half-tremulous over his feat, was dazzled by her eyes. "I know I ought not to have done it," said he, soothingly; "but, candidly, now, you couldn't expect that a fellow was going to put up meekly with your saying 'Bo!' to him, as if he were a goose!"

"You deserved it!" said Lorraine. "Never, in all my life, did I see such airs, such affectations! You looked down upon me!"

"I assure you—I—"

"You were disagreeably negative—you said nothing, you did nothing, apparently you thought nothing!" Lorraine pursued, her blue eyes aflame, her cheeks scarlet, her lips curled, each look an arrow, each word a blow. "You wished to make it appear that you were superior to the people and the occupations which you ignored. You looked ready to crush us with your superiority and your disdain, *your —*"

"No, no, — I give you my word —"

"You considered me an insignificant creature —"

"On the contrary, I declare that from the very first moment I considered you charming."

"Charming! I'm not charming at all. As if I would condescend to be charming. Charming! What or whom should I desire to charm? Men? Do you actually suppose I want to charm men? You're not worth charming!"

"Still," declared Bertie, "I'm charmed, all the same."

"Perhaps you think," Lorraine went on, growing each moment more and more vehement, "that I was invented for your amusement, — to save you from *ennui*. I dare say you look at me as if I were just a young lady, —"

"I'll call you an angel, if you prefer that."

"I'm not an angel; I don't want to be an angel," faltered Lorraine. "I don't want you to use those foolish phrases to me. It is time to renounce this feeble cant, which has neither sense nor meaning. I am not an angel, I am not a charming young lady, — I am a human being, — an immortal woman with brains, a heart, a soul; — I'm not the trivial creature you take me to be. But I see," gasped poor little Lorraine, in a sort of despair, "that it is of no use talking to you like this. You cannot understand me. You think I am a mere tennis-playing girl. Because I do the things other girls do, dress after the fashion, drive, ride, and the like, you endow me with foolish, conventional

thoughts and ambitions. I dare say you fancy that I think about falling in love,—that I am anxious to be married.”

Herbert gazed at her spell-bound. A feeling he was powerless to define had taken possession of him. A load lay on his heart, and yet his head was in a whirl. He felt as if he had hurt some tender, helpless creature, and was ashamed and disconcerted, yet all the time was proud to think that she was prettier even than he had supposed,—that her anger gave intensity to her brilliant blue eyes, and that the rosy transparent cheeks and the little scarlet lips were like flowers. At her final sentence, however, he blushed far more deeply than she did, and dropped his eyes.

“I didn’t mean — oh, don’t think for a moment,” he said, under his breath, “if I behaved lightly, if — I — seemed to — oh, do not for the world believe that! Oh, I know you are a pure, noble soul! I wish you would forgive me — oh, please forgive me, — I really am at your mercy!”

“Men are so coarse, — so stupid,” said Lorraine.

“They are, — they are, indeed.”

“They have gone on making mistakes so long that it is almost impossible for them to understand the truth,” the young girl pursued, her wrath appeased now that she saw him tremble before her, and rather enjoying her opportunity. “Books are all founded on error; novels and poetry are made up of the most incredible mistakes. It is, perhaps, no wonder that you should have such a false idea of

everything." She looked at Bertie with commiseration for his sex, and his helpless ignorance of the real facts of life. "I suppose," she went on, "that you have hardly had a fair chance."

"I haven't, — I assure you, I have not," said Bertie, with some eagerness. "I feel a fit of self-disgust, — I long for something better. Actually, now, I don't think you ought to consider me a hopeless case."

"I am sure I hope you are not a hopeless case," said Lorraine, looking at him, her head a little on one side, her face full of sweetness. She was just about to offer the young man some encouragement, — to impose some task upon him, when her father called her to say good-night to the guests, who were taking leave.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. REESE'S DINNER-PARTY.

MRS. REESE'S dinner-party, so far only a promise of trial and vexation to her, had suddenly become an exciting opportunity. She sent for the gardener the moment she left her room the next morning; then had a conference with Peter. The great lady's caprices were accepted in her household like the vagaries of the wind, which bloweth where it listeth and is not held to logical account for its comings and goings. The gardener received directions to cut every rose on the place, and to decorate the vestibule and hall with his finest palms and ferns. Peter carried to his master the astounding news that he was to get out the "peach-blow" dessert-service, and use the very best Dresden and Sèvres plates for the heavy courses. There had been occasions when Mrs. Reese was in an ill-humor with her guests, and gave directions that the glasses should not be filled too often, and that certain choice dishes should not be offered to the guests the second time. To-night, however, everything was to be on a lavish scale; there were to be four dozen croquettes, four dozen *pâtés*, and four dozen *petites timbales* for the twenty-four guests.

Mr. Reese was a little startled by such prodigal hospitality; but, pondering the subject, he reached the conclusion that his wife was surely going to Europe, and that this was to be her farewell entertainment. He was the more convinced when he beheld her magnificent array as she entered the parlor dressed for dinner. She wore a rose-colored satin with point lace and diamonds.

"Why, Belinda, how splendid you are!" he exclaimed, looking at her in astonishment.

"One might as well wear what one has," returned the great lady, affably. "Do I look well?"

"I wanted to say, 'It is the East, and Juliet is the sun,'" said Mr. Reese, with his best air, for he was certain now that she must be taking leave of Sycamore Hill at once.

Adroit as this compliment was, Mrs. Reese displayed a certain indifference to it, as if it were all very well to have one's husband's admiration before the curtain went up and the real play began.

"You are to take in Mrs. Jasper, Frederick," she remarked, and then, turning, to Miriam, who was entering, she said, "I changed all your cards—Mr. Forbes will sit at my right."

"Mr. Forbes at your right!" repeated Miriam. "Dear me, who is Mr. Forbes, to carry off all the honors?"

"Mr. Forbes is the most interesting man I have seen for many a day," said Mrs. Reese, with an emphasis which made argument superfluous. "I choose to have Mr. Forbes take me in."

"Oh, very well," Miriam replied. "I only hope the other men will not be in a rage."

Miriam hardly knew what all this portended; whether the barriers were all down between herself and Paul, or whether her mother's partiality for him would prove an obstacle. Mrs. Reese had walked to the other end of the room, and was opening the blinds to admit more of the late sunshine. Mr. Reese, who had been rubbing his jaw meditatively ever since his wife announced her intentions, whispered to his daughter, —

"Queer; don't you think so?"

"Very queer," said Miriam.

"Devilish queer, I think. There's evidently something rotten in the state of Denmark."

Paul Forbes took his honors very quietly; but he was disturbed, nevertheless. Mrs. Reese had evidently put him on a pinnacle; and if he were to be obliged to support all this dignity henceforth, he felt as if the effort would be too much. He looked about him at the splendid table appointments. "What unheard-of, preposterous extravagance!" he said to himself. "How brutally rich these people must be!"

It was the first time he had been in the house, and, instead of feeling gratification at these signs of wealth, he suddenly experienced a sinking of the soul and a despondency. He felt a shame at the recollection that he had been making love to Miriam. This glimpse of the way she lived seemed to lay bare his thought and unveil his motives in thrusting

himself upon her acquaintance. All the time, however, that Paul was suffering this disheartenment, he was entertaining Mrs. Reese to her heart's content. He was telling her about Wagner and Liszt, about a day he had once spent at Nohant with George Sand, a dinner in London with Mr. Gladstone and John Morley, camping out in the Sahara, and salmon-fishing in Norway. Mrs. Reese listened enchanted, with open eyes and unappeasable appetite. This was what she had dreamed of. Here was a man who epitomized life for her—it was like Cleopatra's drinking the dissolved pearl; she had the whole riches of the world in her hand, as it were. Evidently, this stranger was experienced in life; he had no awe of grandeurs or of grandees, but treated everything in its just proportions, finding just as much to observe and enjoy in an Arab servant as in an English Prime Minister. She liked his tone; she liked the way he ignored or took for granted certain details which are apt to impress Americans too powerfully. "He is not a snob nor a swell," said Mrs. Reese to herself; "he is just what I always dreamed of."

At the same moment, however, Paul was accusing himself of snobbery and affectation, and felt as if he were passing off his pinchbeck experiences for pure gold. He had, it is true, done all he narrated, and might, if he had chosen, have brought in names that would have inspired livelier interest. Had nothing but the evening's amusement been in the balance, he might have created illusions in the mind of his hostess that she was entertaining, unawares, a person

of really magnificent associations. But he forbore, realizing that he must live up to the great lady's idea of him hereafter, and perhaps feeling that he had better have something in reserve. As Paul talked, he glanced about the table at the guests. There was Polly Chichester, sitting by young Archibald from town, one of the rich Archibalds, who Miriam had said was evidently enamoured of the young girl. Polly wore a white dress, which, cut square in the neck, set off with distinction the most beautiful throat in the world. Paul could not help hoping that Polly found the gilded youth insufferable. It filled him with repugnance that this pure, beautiful young girl should fall to the lot of such a cub. As he looked at her now, she looked back and smiled. It was evident to him that she recognized the fact that they were equally mis-matched at dinner — she with her rich, dull admirer, and he with his hostess. His mood grew lighter. He wished that Miriam would return his glance, but she talked persistently to Dr. Jasper, on her right, and Dr. Chichester, on her left. She was playing a part, and he too had a rôle which he must fulfil to the best of his ability. He only wished that Mrs. Reese would not persist in treating him as if he were a man with wealth and influence — at his back. He longed to tell her that he was a beggar.

At this instant a servant placed a plate, saucer, and bowl before him; and he was so taken by surprise that he uttered an exclamation, and turned eagerly to Mrs. Reese and smiled.

"What is it!" she asked.

"This is the famous 'peach-blow' set," said he. "Was it actually you who bought it at the sale of the Fontenelle collection?"

"Of course it was I. But how do you happen to know about it?"

Paul took up the plate and looked through it.

"The set is unique," said he. "It has a history besides. More than one collector was disappointed in not securing it. I knew it was purchased by an American lady; but I had forgotten the name."

"D'Albert sent me word that it was considered very valuable," explained Mrs. Reese, smiling with pleasure, "and I gave him *carte blanche*. Were you one of those who tried to buy it?"

"Hardly; I appraised the whole collection; I prepared the catalogue. I am used to that work. It gives me one advantage, Mrs. Reese. It enables me to appreciate the magnificence of your dinner-service."

"I knew you would!" she exclaimed, turning her whole face and figure towards him, and speaking with animation. "It seems like inspiration, for I had an instinct that you were worth getting out the 'peach-blow' set for, although I have never found an occasion to use it before. The moment I saw you, I felt that you were unlike these mediocre people."

Paul laughed. "Somebody has to know the worth of those costly baubles," said he. "Not all the people who are willing to pay a hatful of money for

them are connoisseurs. It was my ill luck, when I was studying art, to have a curiosity, a craze indeed, to discover every artist's secret of perfection. Thus I became a convenience to dealers and rich people, and they have conspired to ruin me."

"Do you mean to say that you are ruined?" gasped Mrs. Reese, quite aghast at such a confession.

"Absolutely ruined," Paul answered, cheerfully, smiling at the great lady, who regarded him incredulously. He talked of ruin, yet was as faultlessly dressed as that superfine dandy, Herbert Jasper.

"I don't quite understand," said she. "What was it dealers and rich people did to you?"

"Paid me handsomely for telling them what to buy, — for making catalogues and writing up their collections," said Paul.

Mrs. Reese nodded triumphantly. She had at first supposed that he was rich, but this was better. He pleased her; and she longed to benefit him, to fill his purse, to make up for his poverty and disappointments.

Herbert Jasper had been assigned to Lorraine Redmond for the dinner. When he approached her, she started, blushed, and turned away. "Ah, please now," he murmured, with a piquant sense of having introduced a flutter of self-consciousness into the young girl's indifferent bearing.

Lorraine magnanimously conquered her disinclination.

"Oh, very well," said she, putting her little hand on his coat-sleeve. "It would upset all the table-

arrangements if I said I would not go out with you. And, after all, it hardly matters. You said you were sorry for what you did, and I ought to forgive."

"Did I say I was sorry?" asked Bertie, incredulously. "Did I say I was sorry for what I did?"

"You asked my pardon over and over," Lorraine said, indignantly. "You seemed repentant and rather shocked."

Bertie smiled into her eyes, and Lorraine tried to frown. But insensibly she was beginning to feel well acquainted with this foolish young man; and if she had been candid, she would have confessed that this allotment was pleasant to her. It was, at least, better to have Herbert than to have been obliged to sit by that odious, important, commonplace Trowbridge Archibald, for example.

"I would rather have stayed at home," she remarked, as they took their places at table. "A long dinner is so tedious."

"A long, bad dinner is. But I myself like a good dinner. One has to eat, you know, in order to live."

"Of course one must eat a little, but as moderately and simply as possible."

"One does not want a woman to be a gourmand," Bertie remarked, summoning up his best man-of-the-world air; for he was pleased with the table appointments, and felt his affinity for such grandeurs. "Tell me what a man eats," said he, "and I will tell you what he is."

"Very well," rejoined Lorraine. "Thomas Carlyle ate oat-meal porridge, and what was he?"

"A grumbler and a dyspeptic."

"He was the greatest mind of our century," declared Lorraine, her eyes flashing and her transparent rosy cheeks taking on color. "Living, as he was compelled to, among pigmies and mannikins, what wonder if he found something to grumble at, and his discontent was driven in?"

Bertie quailed. "Oh, I did not mean an author out of the common like that. He was like John preaching in the wilderness, and his food might have been locusts and wild honey. I alluded to the sort of man one knows."

"I grant there is something in your epigram. If a man eats Strasbourg *pâtés* for example, and is knowing about truffles and sauces, I will tell you what he is."

"Ah, please tell me."

"He is a self-indulgent and self-satisfied epicure, — dead to the best thought and aspiration, content with gross materialism," said Lorraine. The two young people looked each other in the eyes. Had this small, fierce creature been less pretty and less aërial, — above all, did not Bertie nurse the delicious consciousness of having wiped off old scores in a way which left a handsome balance to his own account, — he could hardly have borne this thrust.

"Why shouldn't a fellow know what he eats?" he faltered, cruelly hurt, and realizing that against Lorraine's arrows all his man-of-the-world panoply was useless.

"Because a man should put his mind into better

things. And, after all, it is a barren affectation, a survival of the Vivian Grey and Pelham fever for young men to talk in that way. I don't in the least believe that epigram of yours was the outcome of your own experience; it is a mere formula you have picked up, just as you adopt foreign idioms out of phrase-books."

The young man, well equipped for society although he was, stared at Lorraine, honestly puzzled what to say. There was a cessation in his desire to impress this wonderful little creature with his knowledge of the world. Nevertheless, he wanted somehow to please her.

"I don't exactly understand how you know all my faults and failings so well," he said, plaintively; "I don't dare flatter myself that you have ever spent a moment's thought on me."

"Oh, yes, I have, — I have thought a good deal about you to-day," said Lorraine, looking wistfully into his face.

"Oh, tell me, tell me what you have thought," said Bertie, ardently, but speaking very softly. It would have been a matter of conscience with Lorraine to keep back nothing of her impatience with his faults; but the signal was given, and the ladies left the table.

"Miriam, Miriam," said Polly Chichester, putting her arm round Lorraine as they entered the parlor and drawing her up to Miss Reese. "Did you see this small child listen to Bertie Jasper as he poured sweet nothings into her ear?"

"Sweet nothings!" exclaimed Lorraine, in a fury. "We were quarrelling all the time."

"It is so delightful to see Lorraine turning frivolous," pursued Polly. Paul Forbes had left the dining-room with the ladies, and now approached the group of girls. The laughing raillery of Polly's face and manner, Miriam's languid amusement, and Lorraine's air of lofty disdain, threw the three into sharp contrast.

"I am not frivolous," Lorraine declared. "I was talking earnestly, even reprovngly, to Mr. Herbert Jasper."

"When one thinks about a dinner-party in that way," said Polly again, "it becomes a great moral opportunity."

"Still I saw no great moral intention about the way Miss Chichester treated Mr. Archibald," Paul remarked.

"The intention was on his side," said Polly. "He constantly asks, 'Have you done this or that, Miss Chichester?' and then when I reply that I have never gone up the Nile, never tasted Tokay, never played billiards, he says: 'You ought to do it.' He is painfully aware of my deficiencies."

Lorraine was still angry with Polly for her *badi-nage*, and led her away to find fault with her for her worldliness, her snobbishness in putting up with Mr. Archibald, and for her light mention of serious things. Mrs. Reese was unbending to her lady guests, who grouped about her sofa. Miriam, left alone with Paul, glanced at him, then walked on, and

entered an alcove curtained off from the main drawing-room but still a part of it. Here she sat down in a high-backed chair.

"Mr. Archibald wishes to make up to Polly Chichester for her deficient experience," she remarked.

"That pretty, unspoiled creature is too good for him."

"I know she is. I want her to be spoiled, you see. Her absolute contentment vexes me. I have done all I could to disturb her peace of mind,—to make her cry for the moon, and feel sore and bitter at not getting it."

"I suppose she has got the moon; so why should she cry for it?"

"But I have to cry for the moon."

Paul leaned his crossed arms on the back of Miriam's chair, and looked down at her.

"The idea of your crying for the moon," said he.

"I tell you I have cried for it every day of my life."

"Now that I see the house in which you live, it is not so easy for me to believe that you need anything in the world."

"It is true that my mother buys most things which she considers pretty or desirable. She paid twelve thousand dollars for that Meissonnier."

"Yet you cry for the moon!"

"I don't put my faith in chariots or horses, not even in twelve thousand dollar pictures."

"I feel like the poor clergyman who went to his Bishop's palace and, looking round at what was a

miracle of splendor to his eyes, exclaimed, 'What, can his lordship have all this and heaven too?'

"Don't deny me the hope of heaven."

She looked at him for one second as she said this, with a glance which showed her whole face awake with life, color, and tenderness. But he did not answer her look. His eyes were fixed beyond her. All his powers seemed to be needed at the moment to combat something in himself, — his pride perhaps — at least an antagonism to the vivid, varied, and enchanting future which Miriam's look seemed to promise. What I feel at this moment," he said reluctantly, "is that I wish you were not a great heiress. It has depressed me coming here to-night. I no longer feel as if I could possibly be anything to you."

Miriam laughed softly. "I am afraid you think too much about my mother's wealth. All men do. But, then, usually they like me the better for it."

"I don't. Yesterday I felt a will and wish to fight myself a way into your regard. Now I comprehend how stupid it is to expect a princess to care about me. It was the peach-blow dessert-service that took the spirit out of me."

She gave him a glance full of sweetness.

"You see," he went on, "I once swore to myself that I would never, never again have anything to do with a rich woman."

"Having said so much, you ought to say more."

He met her eyes timidly and irresolutely.

"I will tell you the story if you wish."

"Of course I wish it."

She had turned round in her chair, with her back against the arm so that she could look up at him, but now she changed her position, and, although he still leaned over her, he could gain no glimpse of her features.

"When I went to Europe," said he, "I left a cousin with whom I had grown up, Katharine Burt, who four or five years later married a rich young fellow, by the name of Cheever. He soon died, leaving her a childless widow, and she came to Paris with a Mrs. Shaw. They had written me in advance, and I had found them an apartment, furnished it, and engaged servants, so that all they had to do was to take possession. Naturally, as I was a cousin and the most intimate friend Katharine had in Paris, I was a great deal at the house."

"Was your cousin handsome?"

"Very handsome; a brilliant brunette with a superb figure. She was the most luxurious woman I ever knew; she loved extravagance for its own sake."

"Were you in love with her?"

"Of that I leave you to judge. What is love, and what is the hunger and thirst of youth for happiness? Instead of taking up with cheap dinners, I could sit as often as I chose opposite a pretty woman at a perfect meal. For years I had been heartsick with loneliness, and here I had an old familiar friend, who told me without the least reserve every thought which came into her head. It was in all respects a

congenial *milieu*. Kate had a mania for artistic effects, refurnished her rooms every year, and was always putting on fresh toilets full of poetic devices."

"And you loved her," said Miriam, with conviction.

"I told her I did. I told her I worshipped her."

"Were you engaged?"

"To this day I have never been sure what her ideas were on that subject. She declared she could never care for anybody as she cared for me, but she always said 'Wait.' Mrs. Shaw was ambitious for her, considered it a folly for her to marry for love when she might gain a title. Whether Kate loved me or not, who shall say, but all at once, six months ago when I was in Milan, came the news that she had married a German baron."

Miriam looked up at Paul, and smiled.

"She had married a German baron," she repeated.

"Yes, she had married a German baron."

"And you, — how did you bear it?"

"I was angry; I was furious. I am angry still," said Paul; and his whole face showed emotion.

"But were you grieved?"

"Grieved? no! I tell you I was furious. I remembered how I had worked for her for six long years; how joyfully I had run on her errands; what bliss it seemed each day when, after my work was over, I dressed and went to see what service she asked of her lackey. I had been well paid; paid in dinners, in drives in her deep-cushioned coupé,

by an occasional kiss upon her hand. Oh, my pride licked the dust. What stung deepest was the conviction of my own greenness. I said to myself I hated rich women."

"Oh, you never loved her."

"I then and there resigned all ideas of love or of marriage. Such ambitions were over for me. I could never bring myself to marry a poor woman, and I would die sooner than put my heart and my pride into the power of a rich one."

"Why could you not marry a poor woman?"

"I have seen poor men with delicate wives and children. God help them!" Paul was silent a moment, then went on. "Of course," said he, "a man ought not to be poor. But in my trade it is not an easy task to accumulate money."

"But suppose you should fall in love with a poor woman," exclaimed Miriam. "Above all, suppose that she should fall in love with you."

"I cannot imagine such a position," said Paul, dryly. "No woman ever did fall in love with me." He flushed and half turned away. He did not understand the motive of her suggestion, and it depressed him. He saw in a moment that he was a conceited coxcomb for having thought of her at all.

"I am getting to be a first-class egotist," said he. "It is a fortunate circumstance that I am soon to leave Sycamore Hill."

Miriam gave a cry. "You are not going away," she declared, imperiously. "You must not go away."

Paul stood up and stretched out his arms as if cramped from his long stooping attitude.

"How dare you be so good to a poor man?" he muttered.

"Is that a reproach?"

"Yes, it is a reproach," said Paul. "You break down all the barriers which hedge you in. When I am with you I feel no struggle; I forget all care. My poverty does not frighten me, my failure in life does not appall me. But to-night, when I am alone, when I remember you dressed as you are now, and sitting here in this house, I shall say to myself, what part am I acting."

"Are you acting a part?"

"I want to be true; I want to be honest," Paul went on, with a troubled face. "I cannot help—I do not wish to help—falling—in—love—with—you. But what am I, after all, but an adventurer? I have no right to be here. I cut myself loose from Europe resolving to fix myself in my own country. I was sick to death of accepting what did not belong to me; of living among mere shows and shams. I flattered myself that here in America I should find it easy to make a life which was my own,—a genuine, individual life. At the very outset I have accepted fiction for reality,—day-dreams for action. No. I am true to nothing."

"Not even to me?"

"Not even to you. You know very well that I cannot carry a cool heart before you. As I said before, so long as I am with you I am happy; then,

it alone, I question the honesty of my motives, — call myself names, — call you names."

"What do you call me?"

Miriam had risen, and her full, serious gaze met his.

"It is always a man's revenge upon a woman to call her a coquette."

"No matter what you call me," said she, swiftly. "I am not a coquette!" She was struggling against rising agitation. "I must go; my mother will wonder what has become of me."

"Yes, go," said Paul. "I don't dare to have you stay."

He caught her hand just for an instant, and kissed the tips of her fingers. He did not try to detain her, and she fled without a glance back. He stood just where she had left him.

"She loves me," he said to himself; and all his feelings rushed towards her in gratitude and admiration. He looked round the alcove, which was carpeted, panelled, and hung in a way a queen might have been contented with. "I'm a child of good luck," said he, and felt ready to laugh outright at his brilliant, his unparalleled good-fortune. He remembered that a month ago it had been a subject of self-gratulation that he sold out some railway shares at a favorable moment and lodged twenty-seven hundred dollars with Brown, Shipley & Co. "I wonder if these people will ask me what I have to settle on my wife," said he, "and if they are likely to consider twenty-seven hundred dollars a

handsome sum." He looked about him. "That Meissonnier cost twelve thousand dollars," said he. "If a woman pays that for a trashy picture, what will she be willing to pay for her daughter's husband?" He walked here and there peering at the pictures on the wall, and came upon a Daubigny hanging almost in the shadow. He had a strong liking for Daubigny's landscapes; they stirred a passionate regret in him, nevertheless.

"If I could paint like that — throw my soul into such work — the world might wag on as it would," he thought; and for a moment he hated everything which hampered and clogged the actual passion of his heart.

"I was looking for you, Mr. Forbes," said a voice beside him. He turned and found Mrs. Reese at his elbow. "That is a Daubigny," she explained. "This Meissonnier cost twelve times as much; I paid twelve thousand dollars for it."

"Dear at the price," said Paul. "Not but that it is like all Meissonnier's work — immeasurably clever. But the Daubigny is charming. It deserves a better light."

Mrs. Reese had long felt that desire to become a true connoisseur which any purchaser must experience who likes to buy the best thing in the market at the highest price. "Listen to me," said she. "Actually, I know nothing about art. I should like to understand, as you do, at a glance, what there is in that Daubigny. Now, why could you not teach me?"

Paul made a little gesture. "That would be most agreeable," said he; "but it is not so easy to teach any one to see and to feel."

"But you can tell me what you see and you feel," said the great lady. "Hearing you talk about things would improve my taste, and I could acquire your opinions, you know. Of course I expect to pay you," she added, detecting a shade of reluctance in his manner. "I will pay anything you ask — that is, I will go as high as five dollars a lesson."

"Nothing I could teach is worth five dollars a lesson," said Paul, quickly. "You shall have all I know free of charge."

"I accept nothing gratuitous," answered Mrs. Reese, with a little upward movement of her head and shoulders. "I like to have a price affixed to everything, and then I know where I stand."

"It is well to be sure of that," said Paul, dryly.

"You said you were ruined," Mrs. Reese pursued; "if I mistook your meaning, —"

Paul had colored, bitten his lip, and worn an air of disgust at the first mention of the lessons. It hurt his pride, or his vanity, — he did not try to define which, — to have his necessities taken for granted in that way. But, after all, he needed to make money. He had, besides, declared to Miriam that he was uneasy at seeming to stand on a false footing among these well-to-do people.

"I am quite at your orders," said he, interrupting. "I should like to do things like a prince. Nature

deposits in the minds of the poorest of men a preference for doing things handsomely, but —”

“Nobody can do things like a prince without money,” said Mrs. Reese, claiming her prerogative. “You shall give me lessons at your own price, and I also want you to make a *catalogue-raisonnée* of my collection.”

Paul bowed. He felt bored and humiliated; yet he had the self-command to hide his irritation. After all, he could not have expected to seize everything he wanted without any disagreeable processes. He had grown too fastidious, he said to himself; this idle, fictitious existence had led him to believe that he was to have gold and silver in his pocket, costly apparel of the latest fashion, and a carriage waiting at the door—all without paying for it. Yet he knew that in this world no man gets anything for nothing.

“And how much will the catalogue be?” demanded Mrs. Reese, who was eager to have this delightful arrangement definitely settled. “You know what your price has been; name it, and I will double it.”

Paul laughed outright; he dismissed his scruples; he made up his mind to consider such patronage unique good-fortune. The great lady led him about triumphantly, showing him her paintings, sculptures, porcelain, potteries, glass, and bronzes. Turn where they would, Paul saw a tasteless profusion, in which masterpieces and studio scrapings, gold and pinchbeck, real and imitation, jostled each other. Gradu-

lly the shaping, critical impulse asserted itself. He brightened; grew interested. He even found spirit to rally the great lady on some of her worst mistakes, and laughed at her foible of invariably choosing the highest-priced articles. What might have ruined a different man in her estimation, confirmed Paul in her good graces. She became confidential; told him how lonely she was: how all the world, even her husband and daughter, seemed in a league against her. Miriam would not go to Europe, and life at present was a blank, which Forbes's society would fill up. She begged him, however, to keep his lessons an inviolable secret; even the fact that he was making a catalogue for her need not at present be mentioned.

Miriam came towards her mother and Paul as they re-entered the parlor. She brought a cup of tea to each of them, and regarded them inquisitively.

"I hope you have been attending to my guests, Miriam," said the great lady. "I have been showing Mr. Forbes my works of art."

"And what did Mr. Forbes think of your works of art, mother?" asked Miriam, flashing a glance and smile into both their faces—the sort of smile which reminded Paul of the facets of a diamond; so full of brilliance, so many lights.

"Mr. Forbes is an expert," said Mrs. Reese, with a new grandeur of manner. "Mr. Forbes appreciates my collection."

"My mother means that I do not appreciate it,"

said Miriam. "But, then, Mr. Forbes, the next best thing to being an enthusiast is to deny the worth of everything. I long ago found out that to maintain a silent critical attitude, raise my eyebrows, and, perhaps, shrug my shoulders, was to impress everybody with my critical knowledge."

"You are on the wrong path altogether," exclaimed Mrs. Reese. "Mr. Forbes was just saying that only a man who loves, reverences, and knows can criticise."

"But, then, it is so hard to love, reverence, and know," said Miriam, in her arch, tantalizing manner. "Complete negation is so much more easy."

"So much the worse for you." Mrs. Reese made a hopeless gesture to Paul, as if to say, "You see what I have to combat." Then she went on: "But, Miriam, you ought to be attending to the guests."

"They are doing very well. Nora Redmond is telling one group of people about the spirits, and Madeline is entertaining another with her mind-cures. Polly is making delicious cups of tea. And I am superfluous, as usual; I am always the superfluous person."

Paul Forbes, thus placed between mother and daughter, both of whom he wished to propitiate, experienced a stiffness and reluctance. He did not at first challenge Miriam's remark; then, remembering that something was doubtless expected of him, he said, dryly:—

"Ah, well! not everybody can be in as much demand as poor Hans."

"Who was poor Hans?"

"A good man who lay a-dying, while his pastor proffered consolations, assuring him that, after his useful life on earth, he was sure of rewards in Heaven. 'No,' cried poor Hans. 'I expect no peace. I know beforehand it will be just the same up there as here. Everybody will want me at once,—everybody will be shouting after me, "Hans, light up the sun"; "Hans, extinguish the moon"; "Hans, put the angels to bed."'"

Mrs. Reese burst into delighted laughter.

"Is not that clever, Miriam?" said she. "Is not that droll?"

"Very clever, very droll, mother."

"'Hans, light up the sun'; 'Hans, extinguish the moon'; 'Hans, put the angels to bed,'" quoted Mrs. Reese. "It is too delicious. I will go and tell Dr. Jasper." She moved away.

Left alone with Forbes, Miriam had to struggle with herself, to hide the feeling of joy which seized her.

"You have my mother quite under the charm," she murmured.

"She has taken me into her employ. Henceforth, I am to be her paid jester," said Paul.

She looked at him inquiringly, and he told her of the engagement that he had made, adding, "You see, my telling you to-night that I must go away was a mere phrase. I shall remain in the neighborhood. Somebody else must take the responsibility, however. I told you I was a mere adventurer."

"Were I a man, I would be an adventurer," answered Miriam, looking into his face with a caressing smile. "I would accept no dull, safe, guarded experience. I would undertake nothing which had no risk in it."

"There is plenty of risk in my present course," said Paul. "But at this moment I am in a mood to squander my whole life. Being in this mood, there is a certain bathos in seeming to be a man in pursuit of a livelihood. Frankly, I don't relish the idea of taking your mother's money."

"I assure you, you will deserve all she will give you. You will find her the most tyrannical, the most egotistic, the most whimsical of mistresses. But no matter, — I want you to please her."

CHAPTER XII.

A FIGURE OF SPEECH.

MR. REDMOND had always felt much anxious solicitude about his motherless daughters, and, more especially, when he looked forward to that romantic period of their lives when they should fall in love, and be fallen in love with, and his duty would be to guard, guide, and watch over the process known as "maiden's choosing." From the day Nora was seventeen, he had been prepared to meet all parental liabilities with the tender reluctance of a wise father, and the readiness of a man of the world. It had been one of the many parental problems which he had been compelled to ponder that he was not called upon either to accept or to dismiss suitors. Lovers did not seem to be included in these young creatures' scheme of existence. One after the other — Nora, Madeline, and Agnes — had reached womanhood, assumed duties, and made careers of some sort for themselves, without, apparently, realizing that they could have any possible relations to the other sex. Marriage was rarely alluded to among the sisters, and, if the condition of a wife was touched upon, it was discussed as an alternative to a useful female existence. Mr. Redmond had prepared him-

self for a sharp tussle with his daughters' suitors, whose claims he was prepared to deny until he had given their integrity and disinterestedness many crucial tests. Thus, it might have been a relief to be spared the trial of sons-in-law, had he not been embarrassed by the fact that, not only were his girls indifferent to lovers, but that any possible lovers were equally indifferent to them. His daughters were handsome, well made, full of cheerfulness and energy; moreover, it was to be presumed that they were all likely to be well dowered. Nevertheless, not a single suitor had, apparently, ever raised his eyes to them in hope or longing. Men listened with more or less interest to their occasionally brilliant, always voluble, discourse, but they never fell under the charm; in truth, they sometimes showed signs of escaping as soon as they could. Mr. Redmond was obliged to comfort himself, for their lack of conquests, by the belief that his daughters' magnificent brown eyes, which looked forth upon the world with such queenly confidence and dignity, were too much for degenerate men to bear.


But of late, while watching his little Lorraine with the vigilance of a fond parent, he had been startled by some strange phenomena. After looking in vain for thirteen years for romantic symptoms in the young men who visited at the house, he had acquired a very keen vision for signs of indifference. When he first began to suspect Herbert Jasper of taking an interest in Lorraine, he could hardly be certain whether it came from a tender feeling or the reverse.

Herbert was always conscious of Lorraine's proximity. Languid although he might be, his eyes followed her about, and more than once he had gone after her himself. On the evening of the séance, Mr. Redmond had not failed to observe that as soon as Lorraine left the room, Herbert grew restless, and then took himself away. Anxious to gain a clew to what was going on, the watchful parent felt it was a good occasion to glance into the opposite parlor. No moment could have been better calculated to banish any uncertainties about Bertie's sentiments towards Lorraine, for he was kissing her.

Mr. Redmond retreated tingling from head to foot with an odd mingling of emotions, wrath, curiosity, satisfaction, and, above all, amazement. His daughters had always surprised him, but he had never before been surprised in just such a way. It was certainly a most presumptuous, unauthorized, and reprehensible action on Herbert's part: the young fellow ought to be taught how to behave himself. Nevertheless, the proceeding was in entire harmony with Mr. Redmond's traditions concerning his own sex. He had never been able to understand the cold-blooded apathy of the rising generation, and now for once seeing a young fellow behave as he himself had behaved in his youth, — that is, kissing a pretty girl when an irresistible opportunity offered, — he felt a certain relief in realizing that, after all, the world was not absolutely turned upside down. He would never have expected it of Bertie Jasper, but nobody can predict infallibly how a man will act under feminine

provocation, and, from this flood-mark of Bertie's spirited possibilities, Mr. Redmond was inclined to think he was not the mere formal dandy he seemed. Mr. Redmond's vanity was tickled; his feelings as a guardian and chaperon vanished before his satisfaction as a parent. He had suffered acutely over the fact that no man courted his daughters, and this event reinstated him in his pride.

He said to himself that he should be very stern with Herbert, and very decided with Lorraine; but, instead, he was almost tremulous when he shook hands with the imperturbable young man at parting; and when Lorraine gave him a good-night kiss, he put his arm round her, and was ready to weep over her. It seemed to bring his child nearer to him now that he believed her to be stirred by this new but altogether human feeling. He craved the intimate privileges of a mother who could have sought the young girl as she nestled among her pillows, and listened to the whole story from her lips. His sleep was broken that night, for he was preparing the phrases with which to meet the suitor if he came forward with proposals next day. No proposals came, but Mr. Redmond had the opportunity of watching the two young people through the dinner at the Reeses'. Lorraine was full of fire, spirit, and softness; she blushed, she turned away, then looked back, raising her pretty smiling face towards Herbert, who hardly averted his eyes from her, even to eat his meal. It was a charming sight to Mr. Redmond, and he was content to wait and watch these little flutterings and



coquettings before the two birds settled, and mar nothing by impatience or over-haste.

Day by day it grew more and more evident that something was going on.

"Nora, my dear," said Mr. Redmond to his eldest daughter one day when he saw Lorraine sitting with Herbert on a garden-bench, "don't you observe that — that — in fact that young Jasper and Lorraine, — eh?"

Nora turned her luminous unseeing glance towards her father.

"That they are sitting on the grass? Do you mean that the turf is damp? Oh, no, it is as dry as a carpet. Lorraine wants to test Bertie's Greek, and she is reading the Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius with him. See how animated she is! I dare say she finds plenty of home-thrusts for him."

"But have you not noticed that — that — " Mr. Redmond felt that he was almost indelicate in suggesting any romantic ideas to his eldest daughter's unconscious mind. "Don't you see that they are just a little in love with each other?"

Nora burst into a peal of ringing laughter.

"Oh, papa," she exclaimed, "you are the most delighful old dreamer! The idea of Lorraine's falling in love with any one, and above all with that ineffable coxcomb."

"He is extremely good-looking," said Mr. Redmond, a little on his mettle, "and even sensible women have admired handsome men."

"I hope sensible women are growing wiser, then,"

observed Nora. "By this last quarter of the nineteenth century, they ought to have learned a few lessons."

"Yum, — yum," said Mr. Redmond. He was aggrieved by his eldest girl's lack of insight and womanly sympathy, and burned to tell her that the best wisdom of her sex came from the heart, and not from the head. "So you have not seen anything between the two young people to lead you to — to —"

"Nothing in the least, dear papa," answered Nora, full of smiling incredulity. "I cannot understand how you can suspect Lorraine of such folly."

"A little such folly is not ungraceful in a young girl," retorted Mr. Redmond. He was disappointed and shaken, although he still clung to his belief that Lorraine had a lover. He wondered that a mature woman like Nora should have no grasp of the essential meanings of human existence. Good gracious! if her ideas were to be carried out, and all women took to hobbies, industries, careers, and renounced husbands, households, and babies, what a useless creation this globe would be, spinning on, desolate and unpeopled through the wide reaches of the silent universe. However, although the feminine brain was not logical enough to see that two and two must make four, or that chaos would ensue, Mr. Redmond, being a man, could still deduce his opinions from clear and incontestable facts. He shrank, nevertheless, from putting Nora into possession of what he called facts. He wanted to keep his faith

the reality of that kiss unspoiled. Nora might plain it away by some fantastic and bloodless pothesis of pure reason. A kiss from an ardent ung fellow not belonging to his eldest daughter's perience, it was likely to be beyond her imagination as well.

Mr. Redmond allowed no action of Lorraine's to escape his surveillance. It was an incredible thing to him that when she rose at five in the morning and went into the garden to sit in the summer-house, instead of giving a rendezvous to a lover, she should be studying Greek. Mr. Redmond saw all these actions of the young girl under a poetic halo, and could hardly believe that when she sat at her desk for hours, she was preparing abstracts of history, instead of writing billets-doux.

However, few days passed without affording the anxious father confirmation of his hopes, — for hopes they had become. He only waited for an occasion to question Lorraine, and show sympathy with the fluctuations of her mind and soul; and chance threw an occasion in his way. He was sitting alone in a dim corner of the veranda one evening, having returned from a visit to Dr. Chichester at ten o'clock, and, finding the parlors empty, he had concluded that his daughters had gone to bed. In fact, he heard Nora call across the hall to Madeline, upstairs, and sat peacefully smoking his cigar before seeking his own couch. All at once, he was startled to hear Lorraine's voice out of the darkness, saying urgently, —

"But you must! I insist that you shall do so!"

"The moment you insist," somebody answered, "that moment I obey."

"But that sounds so empty, — so insincere," said Lorraine.

By this time, Mr. Redmond's eyes, piercing the gloom, perceived two figures ascending the steps at the farther end of the veranda.

"It is not empty, — it is not insincere," returned Herbert Jasper. "But if one uses words only, one is limited to mannerisms. If you will let me, I will not only promise to do what you say, but I will set my seal to it."

"Set your seal? Well, set your seal," said Lorraine, with her pretty disdain.

Mr. Redmond clearly saw Herbert Jasper bending his head to Lorraine's hand. The pantomime was so effective, perhaps, that nothing needed to be said. At least so far as the excited parent's startled ears could gather, nothing was said. Herbert ran down the steps, and Lorraine remained standing at the end of the veranda. When the last sound of the young man's footsteps died away, she turned as if to go in. Mr. Redmond rose at the same moment, and called her softly. "I was here," he said, plaintively. "I had no chance to make myself known. I came in, found nobody, and thought you were all upstairs."

"It is late," said Lorraine. "Polly and I were at Miriam's, and Bertie and Mr. Forbes came in, and we sat a good while. Then, when Bertie and I were on our way home, he said he had never been able to

understand why Arcturus never set, and it showed such stupidity on his part that I felt as if he ought to be taught at once, and we walked about in order to get rid of the trees, that I might have a chance to illustrate the orbit."

"You understand all about Arcturus, then."

"Yes, papa."

Lorraine's manner, fluent, unhesitating, candid, aroused her father's admiration. These little hypocrisies were so distinctively feminine.

"My dear child," said he, very softly, "just come into my book-room a minute, if you are not too tired."

She followed him silently; he closed the door and turned up the lights. The little flower-like face was full of spirit, but there was no sign of embarrassment in the brilliant eyes or the firm scarlet lips.

"Lorraine," said Mr. Redmond, putting his hand on the girl's shoulder, "you have no mother. Were your dear mother alive, it would be to her I should delegate this little duty. I saw a young man kiss your hand."

Lorraine looked a little troubled.

"Do you think he really did kiss it, papa?" she asked. "I could not feel quite sure. I thought probably he was just going through the motions."

She looked up at him so earnestly he was at a loss what to say. "Certainly my daughters are eccentric," he thought to himself.

"I had been telling him that he must go to work," said Lorraine. "I do consider it preposterous that

an able-bodied young man should be doing nothing. He promised me that he would go to work,—and said he would set his seal upon his promise. It did not once occur to me what setting his seal might mean. And really, papa, thinking it over, I decided that what seemed to be a kiss was a mere figure of speech.”

“Oh, a figure of speech?”

“Yes, that was all. A sort of metaphorical way of making his promise binding.”

Father and daughter were looking quite serious and unsmiling each into the other's face. Mr. Redmond felt as if he must be very cautious, or he would be very imprudent,—very delicate, or his intuitions might seem coarse.

“How do you like that young man, Lorraine?” he now inquired. “He seems to me rather a good fellow in his way.”

“As a young man I don't like him,” said Lorraine, “and I care nothing about his being a good fellow. But, after all, he is a human being.”

“I fancy so,” said Mr. Redmond, almost unable to repress a chuckle.

“He is ignorant, only half-educated,” pursued Lorraine; “and I think he is rather weak. He thinks too much about late breakfasts and elegant dinners. I see that he might easily deteriorate into a very poor sort of character. Everything depends on his taking the right turn now. I want him to go to work, and prove what is in him; I urged him just now to feel that in the present moment, and in the

present moment alone, lies his salvation; that this is his one chance, — that he must do what is in him to do, and reveal whether he has a capacity for life or is to be a mere nullity.”

“And he promised to go to work.”

“Yes, he said that if I insisted on it he would go to work. Of course, my insisting on it ought to make no difference in such an important thing as a man’s career. But Bertie seems dependent.”

“I want to ask you something, Lorraine,” said Mr. Redmond, with agitation. “I don’t mean to be intrusive, but I am your only parent. Is there anything, any — in short, has this young fellow made love to you?”

Lorraine looked into his face with consternation.

“Oh dear no, papa! Never, I assure you.”

“My dear child, reflect! Be candid! I implore you to be candid.”

“Oh, papa, what nonsense! why, there are tears in your eyes! What do you mean?”

Mr. Redmond put a hand on each of the girl’s shoulders and looked down into her face, as if he would fain read her inmost thoughts.

“I saw him kiss you,” he whispered. “That night we had the spirits, — I saw Herbert Jasper kiss you, Lorraine.”

“Oh, that meant nothing, papa, I assure you; that meant nothing — nothing at all. He simply kissed me out of spite.”

“Out of spite!”

“Yes, simply out of spite.”

"Out of spite," Mr. Redmond repeated again, whimsically; and longed to add, "I thought it might have been a mere figure of speech," but desisted.

"It must have looked odd," said Lorraine, with delightful candor. "It never occurred to me that anybody saw it. You see, papa, the first time I met Bertie, I was so impressed by his magnificent imperturbability that I wanted to see if I could make him jump, so I went up to him and said 'Bo.'"

"You went up to him and said 'Bo!'"

"Yes, and what he did was simply a revenge for that."

"Oh, that was it!"

Mr. Redmond looked at the small brilliant upturned face with a fond but puzzled smile.

"You are an odd sprite," said he. "Well, go to bed. You seem to have a good conscience. When you no longer have a good conscience, do you promise to come and tell me about it?"

"Yes, I promise."

"You can set your seal to your promise if you like."

Lorraine laughed and flung her arms around her father's neck, and pressed her glowing young cheek to his. She had never caressed him so warmly.

"I would rather not have you tell any one of this, papa," she said, coaxingly. "It sounds foolish, and, really, I do not think he did actually kiss my hand. The girls would laugh at me."

On Lorraine's way to her own chintz-hung bower, she peeped into Nora's room, and discovered her

eldest sister, still dressed, sitting in an easy-chair, her face turned towards a blank wall.

"Oh, you ought not to interrupt," said Nora. "I am trying a mind-cure. You know Madeline got rid of my headache for me last week, and it seems a pity to give her the trouble, for she says I can just as well do it myself."

"What do you do? Just sit there and exert your will?"

"I don't exert my will. I simply think about my headache, make it the object of all my thoughts. I make myself apprehend that to have a headache is to yield to a foolish whim. I try to eradicate my belief in the headache. Having entirely established my superiority to such a malady, it vanishes."

"I can't believe in it," said Lorraine. "It does not seem to rest on any scientific basis."

"But, then," retorted Nora, "the universe has never waited to work its miracles until the scientists agreed that such things were possible. You go limping after approved phenomena."

"Lorraine," called Madeline, from her room, "you should not be arguing with Nora. She requires absolute tranquillity of mind."

"I think my headache is cured," said Nora. "I had sat quite ten minutes, you know. It is really wonderful what a little hard thinking will accomplish."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REESE HOUSEHOLD.

PAUL FORBES could not avoid feeling in these days that his life was too complex an affair. He had to tell himself at times that he was winning a charming wife in the most difficult way, in order not to gain a disrelish for the situation. He hated his own dexterity,—his own complaisance. Still, the dainty and innocent deceits practised could do no harm. When he entered Mrs. Reese's each day, he was sure to have a glimpse of Miriam. There was always some vista which disclosed her, in approach or retreat. Sometimes he was so near that he heard the rustle of her dress, and caught the perfume of the flowers she wore as she swept past him. If he did not see her, he was sure to hear her at the piano, or practising on her violin, while he sat with Mrs. Reese, and the music penetrated his imagination with varied, vivid, and exciting ideas. At such times his eager expression and a certain vehemence in his manner made the great lady feel that these lessons of hers were an actually ideal entertainment.

Paul could not, however, wholly master the situation. He had not given Mrs. Reese more than half a dozen mornings before making the discovery that

he had an invisible enemy,—at least, that his incomings and outgoings were a matter of some hostile curiosity to the master of the house. Peter opened the door, and, in Paul's leisurely ascent of the broad, shallow stairs, he invariably perceived that he was watched by somebody from a chink in the library door. It was not a difficult matter to make out the outlines of Mr. Reese's slender figure, and the visitor had an uncomfortable sense that he was regarded with suspicion. What these suspicions might be, required small effort of Paul's to conjecture. He was easily intimidated at the idea of an irate father who would impute mercenary motives to him, make him declare his intentions, and precipitate a catastrophe.

The fact was, however, that Mr. Reese had never once thought of Miriam in connection with this subtle and adroit stranger who had wound his way into the household. Blind and indifferent husband although Mr. Reese had sometimes seemed, marital blindness and indifference have their limits. Both Peter and his master found the circumstance of Paul Forbes's daily visits singular—the more singular that on the very day they began Mrs. Reese announced, with an air of elation, that she should not leave Sycamore Hill that summer. Coincident, too, with the daily apparition of this not ill-looking stranger, was a lavish display of costly tea-gowns at breakfast on the part of Mrs. Reese. Her manner, besides, was softened by airs and graces hitherto foreign to it; and she frequently

assumed, even to her husband, a playful, even coquettish, demeanor. Mr. Reese had not hitherto been a jealous husband. However dear his wife might be to himself, he had frankly regarded her as rather repellent than fascinating to the majority of his sex. He was certain that Paul Forbes had cost him the chance of that coveted trip to Europe — that was one distinct cause for hatred. Yet all he could do was to watch and wait and let the situation resolve itself. Every day he remarked to Peter, "There's something rotten in the state of Denmark," and Peter also watched and waited.

Meanwhile, the great lady found an expansion of soul in this new companionship. She was indefatigable in study, and in a fortnight could have passed successfully a competitive examination in names, dates, periods, and schools. She talked a good deal to Paul, besides: confided in him, asked his advice. A paid auditor is a distinct boon to *une femme incomprise*. She talked of her own life, which had had as many epochs as the art she was studying. She told him a great deal about Miriam, and her own ambitions concerning that erratic and unmanageable young woman. She gave him a full history of Mr. Reese's poetic wooing — their early conjugal happiness, and its decline and fall. From the moment her riches came, she had felt a change in him. She would not affirm that he actually wanted her fortune to be at his own disposal; but, clearly, there was something in his mind which gradually turned him to stone. Once he had been eloquent with feeling

and passion; but now he was dumb, dumb. He neglected her, had become absorbed in Shakspearian researches, and at present had but one interest in life: that was his club.

"You know, Mr. Forbes," she added, in a whisper, "that I do not believe in the Shakspeare Society at all."

Paul looked puzzled.

"I mean," she went on to explain, "that it is all a pretence of theirs to be studying 'Hamlet.' I have read the play—I have read it twice over; and although Hamlet is a most inconsistent and unpleasant young man, there is nothing incomprehensible about him. I have, besides, seen Booth, Fechter, Irving, and Salvini act it. I said to myself if there was a mystery about the play, I would find it out. But there is no mystery about it; not the slightest. And it does seem to me the most ridiculous affectation for half a dozen decently intelligent men to pretend to spend so much time over it. And I am certain these meetings are not devoted to Shakspeare, but to something else."

"It is the fashion nowadays to have societies for the better comprehension of authors," Paul suggested. "There is the Browning Society, for example."

"It is very natural to have a Browning Society, just as one has a key to a Chinese puzzle,—but Shakspeare wrote good English. No; I have my own ideas about this Hamlet Society. On the nights when it meets, I sit in the parlor or go to my bedroom and say to myself, 'Let them work on to their appointed

end, and Lord deliver us from evil!’ I can do no more. But I assure you, Mr. Forbes, it is hard to preserve a religious frame of mind when I reflect that here in my own house, bought and paid for with my own money, something is going on which I know nothing about.”

“It is hard. But then, Mrs. Reese, women’s imaginations are over-lively concerning men’s amusements. We are a dull set—more innocent than you might suppose.”

“*You* may be,” she responded. “You are different from other men,—I saw that on the instant.”

In fact, the great lady seemed at times not indisposed to flirtation, and would no doubt have doubled his pay had Paul been willing to respond to her coquettish advances.

“In fact,” Miriam said to Paul, one day, “you please my mother so well that I am tempted to hate you just out of human contradictoriness. You go promptly to her; you leave her reluctantly; you come to me tardily. Why, only yesterday I walked up and down here twenty minutes waiting for you.”

“But, then, you see,” said Paul, “that with your mother it is a purely practical question. She pays me five dollars an hour, while you—you rob me, instead—rob me of peace of mind, of sleep, of appetite,—almost of courage.”

“I confess,” said Miriam, “I can’t pay you five dollars an hour—and I don’t consider you worth it.”

“That is just it,” retorted Paul; “your mother appreciates me. I like to be appreciated.”

Paul was on his way back to the Jaspers', and, taking his way through the great belt of oaks and hestnuts which girdled the place, had come upon Miriam as if by accident. She was sitting on the ground, with an enormous mastiff beside her. It was a warm day, and the dog panted; but the heat had simply heightened Miriam's color, and given her eyes unusual brilliancy. Paul sat down beside her, and took both her hands in his. He no longer asked himself how he stood with her. All the scruples he had ever felt as to his becoming the suitor of a rich girl had become merged in his desire to win her. He saw that there was some little vexation or pettishness to be expended, but what he cared for at the present moment was that she looked charming with this warm glow; her lips were fresh and blooming, her teeth small, white, and regular.

"Go on scolding me," said he; "I like it."

"I do not like it," said Miriam. "Why did you not come back last night after you had taken Polly home? In fact, no necessity existed for your going with her at all. Peter could have gone, or even Joseph."

"But, dear child, you insist that I shall in every respect guard appearances, and never betray myself before your mother. How, then, would it have looked for me to stay behind with you, leaving a servant to escort Miss Chichester, while Bertie went home with Miss Lorraine Redmond?"

"Confess that you enjoyed going home with Polly."

"I have no fault to find with the little walk."

"What did you talk about?"

"Oh, how can I remember? Nothing particular."

"Ah, ah, ah! Now, Paul! Did you not say to her,—‘You are so young, do not be in a hurry to settle your fate. Above all, be sure that what may seem to be your fate is your fate, and not a test of the qualities of your mind and heart.’”

Paul looked at Miriam in surprise—she was deeply in earnest. He was annoyed at having put himself in a false position by evading her question.

"I am sorry I seemed to be untruthful," said he, dryly. "I did say that. I want to be perfectly open with you; but yet I wish not to displease you. Henceforth I will never be a coward. Did she tell you?"

"She is such a limpid creature that I can always see clear through to the very bottom of her conscience. She was thoughtful to-day, and bothered because Mr. Archibald had sent her some flowers. She had decided to tell her father that she would not have these attentions; but I argued her out of it. I do not know how you can be willing to take the responsibility of breaking off a good match like that."

"I cannot see that it is a good match. To my mind, it is desecration for her to lower herself to accept that fellow. She does not love him. She never could do more than tolerate him. I said what I did to her without premeditation. It seems to me that at a critical moment of her destiny nobody offers that young girl any good advice."

What do you know against Mr. Archibald?"
Don't let us argue it anew. I simply said to her, when she remarked that she could not come to yesterday because Mr. Archibald was calling, at to-day she feared she must stay at home to her sister: 'You are so young! do not be in a hurry to settle your own fate.' Was there any harm in that?"

"It is a very good fate."

"Very well! I consider him next door to a brother—but no matter."

"The fact is you are deeply interested in Polly. I am sure of it."

"I moved nearer to her, and his eyes looked down at her with calmness and serenity. "Why do you care for Polly?" he asked.

"You could love Polly as you will never love me. I could dazzle you, fill your mind and your soul,—make you indifferent to past and future, blindly and thirstily eager to gain your covetousness, so that if you were offered the kingdom of heaven you would throw it over for your little kingdom on earth."

"Miriam expected an immediate response to this statement, she was disappointed. Paul continued to look at her with a full, candid glance, as if he were reading her meaning. He did not smile, but she felt that he considered her words extravagant and foolish. She realized, too, that they were reckless, exposed the hunger of her heart, which she tried to hide. She blushed and hung her head.

"I advise you not to feel like that," he said, finally.

Miriam was often struck by Paul's simplicity and moderation. It sometimes seemed to her as if every one else she had met with was the victim of some craze or other, while he was admirably sane. She had been in a state of torture all the morning since Polly had told her about the conversation the night before. It was evident to her perceptions that the young girl had been moved to the very soul by Paul's words. They had addressed her womanly conscience, — and roused susceptibilities hitherto latent and unfelt. Miriam knew very well that it was her own jealousy which distorted the meaning of the caution the man of thirty had given to the girl of nineteen. But, after all, why should he be concerned in any question which regarded Polly? She wanted his love for herself; rather than share it with any one else, she would fling it away and trample on it. Still, she had the good sense to perceive that her imagination had travelled farther than Paul's had done in relation to Miss Chichester. She knew that in broaching these complaints she seemed odd and incomprehensible, and that she was behaving in a way fatal to her own interests.

"But, really," she persisted, "you ought to have told me exactly what you said to her."

"I wish I had. Candor is my habit." He looked at her, smiling into her flushed and ardent face. "I swear I always will be candid with you. But, Miriam, trust me! I insist that you shall trust me.

Distrust is an ugly thing between two people." He put her hand to his lips. "All this is so absurd!" said he. "Suppose I were to come to you and begin scolding about what you said to Edward Jasper yesterday! Now, I am well aware that he is in love with you,—yet it never occurs to me to be jealous. Yet here you are putting I know not what construction upon my kind feeling for a friend of yours, who simply seems to me an enchanting child, whom everybody neglects. Good heavens, how little you make of yourself, Miriam. Don't you realize what it is to me to have you—I don't dare say love me,—but simply look at me,—smile at me! Don't you know that my days and nights are full of you,—that—"

She put her hands to her face, for his glance made her too happy and triumphant. "Don't flatter me," she said, softly; "I love your flattery too well."

"Miriam," said Paul, "tell me that you love me."

She had uncovered her face, and now shot one vivid glance at him, then dropped her chin on her breast.

"I don't dare,—you see," she added, fighting with herself for self-command; "this is all so new to me,—this depending on some one. I shall gradually recover my balance—settle down—I will try to change—I will try to improve."

"No," said Paul, "don't change,—don't improve. You shall always be the same as now, with your sudden angers, your doubts, your jealousies,—your idle efforts at being wise, your perpetual and delightful

follies. And to content you, I shall have to pass my life in soothing you, in adoring you, — in trying to teach you what you will never understand.”

Her look was searching him.

“What is it I shall never understand?” she asked.

“How passionately grateful I am to you.”

“Don’t talk of gratitude, — one of my terrors is that your feeling for me is all gratitude.”

“Oh, of course. I know that no poor man can be credited with disinterestedness.” He pondered a moment. “At first,” said he, “that dread of being considered a fortune-hunter was strongest of all my feelings, except while I was with you. Now it is all burned up, — all my pride and my self-sufficiency, — all burned up like straws in a bonfire. And, besides,” he went on more lightly, “it is possible enough that your mother will cast you off when the question comes of your marrying me, — you may have to accept my poverty.”

“Paul,” cried Miriam, leaning forward, and putting a hand on each of his shoulders. “Paul, would you marry me if I had no money?”

“With rapture,” he answered, and their full glances met. Miriam’s tired, ardent spirit seemed to be laved in the power and calmness of his glance, as if she had thrown herself into a cool, deep spring. He leaned towards her, and for the first time kissed her on her lips. At the same moment a bird out of a deep thicket uttered broken and anxious notes, and the spell of happiness and security relaxed.

“But all the same,” Miriam said, with a little tinge

of imperiousness, "you must win my mother's consent. Poverty would be horrible, and I have heard you say that nothing would induce you to marry a poor woman."

"Your mother is ambitious for you."

"You can make her feel that all her ambitions are more than gratified by having you for a son-in-law. You can do it easily." She smiled at him coyly, bent, and laid her cheek against his coat-sleeve. "I know how you have transformed everything for my eyes. Formerly life was a great blank, to be filled up with sleeping, eating, occupations, lamentations. Now I lie awake at night to think how happy I am."

Paul did not answer. They sat silent for a few moments hand in hand. It had been shady and cool when he found her in the forest nook, but now the glare invaded their retreat.

"It is warm," said he; "we will walk on."

As he gave her his hand, a smile of absolute faith and satisfaction passed between them. A little foot-path debouched from the open and led along the banks of the ponds, which were bordered on this side by larches and willows, whose branches trailed like green hair in the water, and rose and fell with its motion. As they advanced, the trees grew closer, luxuriant creepers wound from bough to bough and made the path seem like a bower endlessly prolonged. A thrush began to sing in the silence.

"I feel perfectly stupefied with contentment," said Miriam.

"I will not spoil it by a word, then."

"No, not a word."

They passed the chain of ponds, and followed the bed of the stream itself, which gurgled along, even compassing the miracle of two melodious little waterfalls of half a dozen inches or so. One of these, at the turn made by the great roots of an oak, was so pretty that Paul had a fancy strike him of a scene in Fontainebleau forest which he had once painted. He suddenly remembered that exactly twelve months before he had been at Barbizon with his cousin and Mrs. Shaw. They had stayed for a month, in the most enchanting weather. Scraps of their old talk floated to his mind; he saw Katharine Cheever in a green dress walking towards him from just such a group of trees as this. He suddenly put his hand to his forehead, and uttered an exclamation.

"Paul!" exclaimed Miriam, "Paul!"

The powerful chain of memory and feeling did not at once let go its grip. He looked at the girl beside him with a half bewildered expression. Who was she? What was this wood? Where was Katharine, who had her hand on his arm a moment ago?

"Where were your thoughts?" said Miriam.

"It suddenly occurred to me that a year ago at this time I was at Fontainebleau."

"Your cousin was with you," she said, in a tone of intense conviction.

"Yes, she and Mrs. Shaw were there."

"You were thinking of her at that moment."

"Yes."

A bitter, reckless look swept over Miriam's face.

"Oh, that bad false woman!" she exclaimed. "She invades my paradise, and spoils it for me."

Paul laid his hand on her arm, and pressed it down hard.

"I wish, dear," said he, "I could lay my soul bare before you."

She was touched and pleased.

"Oh, you are good," she said, warmly. "I do believe in you,— I will believe in you."

CHAPTER XIV.

A ROMANTIC FELLOW.

MR. REESE was hostile to Paul Forbes; but, then, Mr. Reese was biassed by jealousy. Every one else at Sycamore Hill found the visitor agreeable. All success, however, brings its attendant troubles, and it was a difficult matter for Paul to adjust the various claims upon his time, and give everything its fair place. As soon as he made his engagement with Mrs. Reese, he looked up some rooms where he might establish himself comfortably, command his hours, and get some chance to make out the catalogue. But the Jaspers, under one pretext or other, refused to let him quit his present quarters. There was always a dinner or a tea coming off, for which he must remain.

"The truth is, Forbes," said Dr. Jasper, one morning, "my wife is in love with you. You may as well look the fact square in the face,—a woman's affections shouldn't be trifled with. Moreover, I find it exceedingly convenient to have you here, paying all those little attentions which she expects from me, and which are no end of a bore to a man of my age. I think it is far better for you to stay on permanently."

"But you don't consider my peace of mind, Dr. Jasper," said Paul. "It seems safest to retreat while I can."

"Oh, I don't care anything about your peace of mind. I was only thinking of my own."

Mrs. Jasper was presiding at breakfast, with her husband opposite and Paul at her right hand. The two vacant places were likely to be filled by Edward and Herbert a little later, but nobody looked for their presence promptly at eight o'clock. Mrs. Jasper eludes the novelist who would present her as a character; for, although she possessed a most effective individuality, she rarely made a remark which could be chronicled. She was always doing something to make every man about her more comfortable, — was always well dressed, and in good humor; she invariably said exactly the right thing, although it was apt to be "Yes," or "No," or "I think so." She smiled at Paul and her husband as they talked; laughed outright when the Doctor was especially absurd; but, so far, had only remarked that she wanted Paul for her party. *

"Dr. Johnson said once that he was tired of hearing the family history of the — somebodies, I forget who they were — and wanted to hear the history of the Thrales instead," the Doctor pursued. "Now, Forbes is tired of the family history of the Jaspers, and wants to study that of the Reeses."

"Say, rather, of Mrs. Reese's pictures. Not but that I prefer to stay here. But I must finish Mrs. Reese's catalogue, and then find some real work.

You know that somehow I have to provide food and fire for the coming winter."

The Doctor laughed. "You're a sly fellow, Paul," said he, "a sly fellow. I only wish I felt as sure, as you may safely do, of having my bread buttered to the end of my days."

Paul had the grace to blush a little. He knew he was a sly fellow nowadays, but did not pique himself upon the character. He made no unnecessary mysteries, but he held his tongue, and extenuated and explained nothing.

"Here comes Bertie," said the Doctor, "actually up and dressed by 8:10. I wonder what is the matter."

Bertie kissed his mother. "Nothing is the matter, sir. I am simply going to town on business."

"On business?" repeated the Doctor, quizzically.

"And henceforth," proceeded Bertie, "I expect always to be up early — earlier than this."

"So do I," said Paul Forbes. "That is the reason I must go away, Mrs. Jasper. Here my days are only half long enough. I woke up at half-past five this morning, and I had an instinct to get up and set to work. But I was so comfortable; the room looked so pretty, as I lay in my bed; the curtains waved gently; out of one window I had a glimpse of sunlight, blue sky, and green creepers, all of which were reflected in the mirror; accordingly, I lay still."

"And went to sleep?"

"No, I lay there wide-awake."

"He was thinking about Mrs. Reese, — "

"Mrs. Reese is like Macbeth," said the Doctor; she murders sleep."

"If the great lady were as fond of me as she is of aul Forbes," said Herbert Jasper, "I should sleep like a cherub. I consider his fortune made."

"She does not make people's fortunes. I don't suppose Miriam ever had a hundred dollars of her own in her whole life," said Edward, who had come in. "Her mother pays her bills, — "

"She can play odd tricks, Paul; look out for her," said the Doctor. "She has invited us there to dinner more than once, when, positively, there was not enough soup to go round, — when nobody was offered a single dish the second time. And, on one occasion, when the pastry came in, there was a crumpled little tart with a quarter clipped out of it."

"I can recommend that pie," said Mrs. Reese, "I saw it laid out in the pantry an hour ago, and felt like trying a piece — accordingly, I took it."

"They say that the butler gave her notice, if such a thing happened again, he should quit her without warning."

"I wonder if Mr. Reese ever longs to give notice — he looks dissatisfied with his place."

"You see, Forbes, we are all trying to stop you at the brink of the abyss," said Edward.

"There is a moment in every man's career," remarked the Doctor, "when he is on the point of doing something very wise, or very foolish. What everybody aims at is to make him do the foolish thing."

"So far in life I have invariably done the foolish thing from choice," said Paul.

"Don't do it now," said the Doctor, significantly, but his caution left Paul no wiser than before.

Breakfast was over; Mrs. Jasper went to her house-keeping, the Doctor to his office, and the three young men walked down the broad gravelled path smoking their cigars.

"I say, now," began Bertie, "how do I look? I mean how do you fellows think I am got up?"

"Got up? I don't see anything in particular: brown tweed dittoes; a cambric tie; a high collar, and gaiters. You have looked better, and you have looked worse. Going to offer yourself to somebody?"

"Something of that sort," said Bertie. "What I had in my mind when I dressed, don't you see, was to look rather practical and business-like."

"You look as business-like as a lily of the field."

"Come, now," and he turned for satisfaction from his brother to his friend.

"You are just the thing; the studs are perhaps a trifle — a mere trifle stunning, you know."

"I'll look up some plainer ones," murmured Bertie, regarding himself with a silent scrutiny for a few minutes. He went into the house, and twenty minutes later re-emerged with a hat on his head and an umbrella in his hand.

"Well, ta-ta," said he.

"What does that umbrella mean?" asked Edward.

"On my soul, I do believe you are going to propose,

and you've read in Artemus Ward about that British parent who sternly refused his daughter to a suitor because he had been seen setting out from home without an umbrella. Such a man, argued the British parent, having no prudent foresight, no wise prevision, was unfitted to become a husband and father of a family. You evidently intend to propitiate the sire of your beloved."

"I do," said Bertie. "Ta-ta."

"He's a silent fellow," remarked Edward; "I wonder what he has got in his head. It is impossible that he should be in love."

"In love? Not he," returned Paul. "Some day a desirable woman will fall in love with him, and he will make up his mind that it will be just as well to accept the ripe plum which is ready to fall into his mouth."

The two paced up and down the path bordered by tall oleanders whose rose-colored blossoms showed to perfection against the pale blue sky, stopping as they reached the lower end to look at the butterflies and the humming-birds in the flower-garden beyond, which was brilliant with stocks, clove-pinks, phloxes, and gillyflowers.

"I don't think you often find a romantic fellow nowadays," said Edward. "I take it, you yourself don't go in for romance and poetry much."

"Honestly, now, what do you think about it?" asked Paul.

Edward laughed. "Honestly, now?"

"Say what you really think."

"I really think you are a highly civilized fellow. Now mustn't a man be something of a barbarian actually to fall in love?"

"And not being a barbarian, I can't fall in love, eh?"

"It couldn't be a matter of life and death with you."

"I am thirty-one years old, and I try to use few fine phrases. A matter of life and death means to me an organic disease, — a shocking accident. I'm not the least of a cynic, but I will confess that when I hear of heart-breaking love-affairs, I can't help saying to myself, 'If that is the worst, he will get over it.' Yet I am no skeptic regarding the worth of an honest love."

"You might not think it," said Edward, with some natural elation at his superior privileges, "but I myself am a romantic fellow. Bertie, now, hasn't a grain of romance in him."

"Not a grain," said Paul, and he would have included Bertie's brother in the same unromantic category, if he had not thought Edward's illusions concerning his own spirited possibilities something so naïve that it was charitable to wink at them. "When you call yourself a romantic fellow," he continued, "you ought to explain whether it is ignorant bliss, or, as somebody said about a man's second marriage, the triumph of hope over experience."

"I'm romantic — that's all I know about it," said Edward; "I don't brag of it."

"But you look down on me all the same for not being romantic," said Paul. "Let me confide to you something. I've doubled the cape, — I've been romantic, — I've been in stormy seas. Now I've reached port."

Edward grew pale at these words, and forgot to answer, standing still in the same position, looking at Paul Forbes, and from time to time twirling his moustache.

"Romance is not a substantial basis for action," Paul pursued, "but it is a key to some very great pleasures in life. It is like uncorking a flask of perfume in a dull, close room, simply to think of some things and of some people."

Edward had folded his arms, and was leaning against a vase surmounted by a prickly aloe.

"Certain romantic ideas seem to be the heritage of man," pursued Paul. "Now, in the morning, when I throw open my shutters and look out upon this lawn and gardens, and see the wind stirring the tree-tops, and the wet light on the quivering leaves, and breathe the soft freshness and the wandering scents, — it all gives me a pang, — a pang not of longing, but of association. I seem to remember something like it, — but there is no clear idea, — it is all lost in mist."

Edward burst into a forced laugh.

"All that is very fine," said he; "but that is merely æstheticism. It is evident you don't know what romance is."

Paul laughed.

"Well, how could I be expected to know?" said he. "When I set up to be a painter, I intended to feel and be inspired by all that had been beautiful, strong, heroic, and tender in history, all that was actual and passionate in every-day life. But when, instead of serving Art as a lofty pursuit, I used my knowledge of art as a prosaic bread-making machine, of course I gave up my dreams,—I renounced romance for good."

"That is all very fine," said Edward, "but"—He broke off,—then added, "you are talking about romance in the abstract,—now, I mean by *romance*—"

"I know what you mean by romance," said Paul. "You mean to narrow the word down to express love."

"I mean to raise the word to include the greatest fact of existence, which is love," said Edward. "When I say I am a romantic fellow, I mean that I'm capable of falling in love."

"And when you say I'm an unromantic fellow, you mean that I am not capable of falling in love."

"Oh, I don't go so far as that," said Edward; "I've thought a good deal about you of late, and I have wondered just what your limitations were. You are a very lucky fellow,—you have a brilliant future before you."

"Have I?" said Paul. He had no intention of committing himself to Edward. His love-affair was one in which he needed to tread warily. "It is hard to give up hoping," he went on, "and there is hardly anything in life which does not at times seem

thin reach. It does not seem likely I shall paint the Daubigny or Rousseau, — yet I go on fancying I could do it, if I had only the time for it. I enjoy my auguries — particularly the delicious vagueness of them. Proceed.”

“You will marry a rich woman,” said Edward; that is definite enough.”

“Yes, that is delightfully definite,” returned Paul. I hope you will go on to say that I am also likely to be as handsome as Apollo, as brave as Achilles, and as long-lived as Methuselah.”

“No; I only say that you are going to marry a rich woman,” asseverated Edward. “What other splendid results may come within your compass, I don’t pretend to predict. But she is in love with you, and she ought to do something for a man.”

Paul was horribly embarrassed, and, let him try as he might to command his features, he felt a foolish, dissatisfied, self-satisfied smile broaden his countenance against his will.

“You declared just now that you were in port for stormy seas,” Edward went on, —

“But good gracious,” exclaimed Paul, laughing outright. “I meant nothing about love or marriage. I am exceedingly obliged to you, — I am certain you have the kindest intentions, but we hardly understand each other.”

“I understand — but I am, perhaps, a little premature,” persisted Edward. “Call it prescience, — jealousy, — what you will,” he paused, a little agitated.

"Prescience, — jealousy!" repeated Paul.

"I told you I was a romantic fellow," said Edward, "Now, up to the moment of your coming home with Bertie, I had hopes of succeeding in winning the wife I wanted."

Paul raised his eyes to the sky. "Ah!" said he, in his bright deliberate way, "ah!"

"I did not feel certain of anything," Edward went on. "I knew I had roused no such feeling in return as that which I gave, but I was tolerated and I was content. Now I am not content. I want to throw up architecture and go out West. I tell my father that if he will give me five thousand dollars, I will buy a ranch, stock it, and raise sheep."

"Raise sheep!" Paul was looking at Edward incredulously.

"I told you I was a romantic fellow. A matter of life and death with me is not necessarily a fever or an accident."

Paul had the air of a man who is startled by bad news. "Do you mean," he began, after a pause, "do you mean —" Then added with eagerness, "For God's sake tell me what you do mean!"

Having spoiled his rival's peace of mind, Edward felt better satisfied.

"What I mean is," he explained, "that after you came it was all over with my chances. Her eyes never met mine — they were always following you; she never heard a remark until I had repeated it three times over — she only listened to what you were saying. I had been in hopes that she would

take up with me because she had been through a good deal, and hoped little from life. But she was never in love until she saw you. You taught her that everything she had ever dreamed of might, after all, come to pass."

"This is a temptation of the devil," muttered Paul. "*Vade retro!*"

"Yes, I understand her well enough," pursued Edward, enamored of his rôle. "What I doubt is your disinterestedness. I wish you really loved her. She deserves it. She's a noble creature."

Paul looked Edward in the face.

"I appreciate your candor," said he.

"But you don't return it."

"Not being a poet or a romancer, as you are, I cannot talk of things which do not exist," said he.

"Oh, I see, I see," said Edward; "and the thing is better not talked about until your way is clear. Mrs. Reese is capable of all sorts of freaks. You do well to propitiate her; it was a fault of mine that I did not propitiate her. I always told her she had no right to be so rich; that at least she ought not to expend her money in buying works of art for her own house; that she was merely the stewardess of her great income, and ought to devote it to the interests of society; that, in fact, nothing she had really belonged to her any more than it did to me."

"She might have said, as Dr. Johnson did once, that when a man talks like that, it is time for other people to lock up their spoons."

"She locked up all she could from me; she meant

that I should have nothing to do with her daughter. Well, to change the subject," Edward added, taking a map out of his pocket, "I'll show you where my future ranch is likely to be."

Meanwhile, Herbert Jasper was being whirled into town, bound upon a mission not wholly unconnected with romance. He was thinking that if he had the good luck to succeed in his present object, he should be perpetually going into town at this hour in the morning. He wondered how what he wished to bring to pass must be effected — if there were examinations, if he had to do sums in figures, and answer comprehensive questions in finance. He could not help relying a good deal upon his luck; yet he had a deep consciousness, which was not without its charm, that he had promised, and meant honestly to try, to be a new man, to live differently, and have a passionate desire for perfection. Insensibly his practical and business-like mood changed into reverie; instead of thinking about whether he could answer a banker's preliminary examination, he was thinking about the banker's daughter; and all his powers, instead of being concentrated upon money-making, were directed towards the spending of a nice little income in a certain way. The future took on vivid, varied, and enchanting shapes. In fact, Herbert's state of mind while on his way to consult Mr. Redmond would have surprised any one in the world except Mr. Redmond himself.

The banker gave a start when the young man's card was brought in to him. At the idea of a visitor

Before eleven o'clock in the morning, he had frowned and shaken his head; but on reading Bertie's name his face changed; he even flushed slightly. "Ask him to wait fifteen minutes," said Mr. Redmond; and then show him in here."

As long as the fifteen minutes seemed to the young man in the ante-room, they seemed still more interminable to the banker, who found it impossible to fix his mind on his correspondence. When Herbert finally entered, however, he saw not a symptom of nervousness in Mr. Redmond, who sat bolt upright in his office-chair, with his back to the light, grave and rather stern.

"I am glad to see you," he said, with a polite air conceding something for acquaintance' sake. "What can I do for you?"

"That depends on your benevolence," said Bertie. "I cannot claim much on my own merits, for, if I have any, I have never yet displayed them to you."

"Can it be, — can it be?" Mr. Redmond thought to himself, interpreting the words to suit his own capabilities.

"Sit down," he said, aloud. "I stretched a point in letting you in at this hour of the day, so you can be of my general good-will towards you."

Herbert sat down, crossed his legs, leaned his head on the arm of the chair, and rested his cheek on his palm. It was impossible for Mr. Redmond to feel that there was something eminently satisfactory in the sight of a young man so handsome,

and, above and beyond mere good looks, so well washed, well dressed, and well brushed.

"I want," said Herbert, "an object in life." ["Dear me, what a way to put it!" thought Mr. Redmond to himself.] "You can be of the greatest service to me."

"I assure you I feel an interest in you," returned Mr. Redmond, a little embarrassed by these generalities. "I — I — that is, you are the son of a man I highly respect."

"I wish," said the young man, "to go into business, and nothing would suit me so well as to find an opening in your banking-house."

Mr. Redmond experienced an acute sense of disappointment, yet he would not have dared to confess to himself what he had expected. His features stiffened, the smile died off his lips. "It is not so easy," he observed, dryly, "it is not so easy as it might appear to you, to start, at your age, in a concern like ours. Our men begin very young, work very hard for little or no pay, until there is a chance for promotion."

"I can't begin very young," said Bertie, sweetly, "for I am twenty-four. But I am quite willing to work very hard, and for little or no pay, until I can be promoted."

"You know nothing about business."

"Nothing." The young man looked at the elder with a tranquil smile. "I have had a fairly good education," he went on. "I have never been called deficient in ability. What I undertake I generally do."

"So far, your undertakings have not been important."

"I make no pretensions," pursued Bertie. "I mean to be solid. I think, sir, if you would try me, you would find me solid."

"Have you consulted your father in taking this step?"

"I have not." Bertie dropped his eyes. "I had expected to look about me a good deal before I settled down, — I wanted to be sure. Now there is my brother Edward; he has made a great many mistakes. My wish was to make no mistakes."

"But you may be making a mistake in coming here."

"No, I think not," said Bertie, with decision. "The important thing for me to do at present is to go to work. I want to show — to show people that I have got it in me to do something; — I am willing to stick to business like grim death, — I don't care how dry the details are. Ultimately, I should like to accumulate property, — to be a man in a similar position to yourself, Mr. Redmond."

"On my word, you flatter me! The firm was Wells & Redmond when I went into it. My father had worked up from the lowest place, and he made me do the same. I went through the University, then came here, at the age of twenty. I had fifty dollars the first year, and a hundred the second. You would hardly be content with that."

"Nothing would suit me better. Give me fifty dollars the first year, a hundred the second, and so on, —"

"Until you are a partner," suggested Mr. Redmond, slyly.

"I should like that remarkably. Still, I am not altogether a presumptuous fool, and all I ask for the present is a chance to go to work."

"A great many men ask that in vain. Only a few young fellows are so lucky, nowadays, as not to feel themselves supernumeraries."

"My father has always impressed it upon my mind that I am a superfluity and a bore," Bertie put in. "Yet, I will confess to you, Mr. Redmond, that I have not the faintest intention of dwindling into nothingness because the world could have got on without me. Although it is, doubtless, of no account to anybody but myself that I am cold or hungry, I mean, all the same, if I am cold to have a coat for my back, and, if hungry, to eat my dinner. And, if you would give me the means of eventually providing both for myself, I shall feel under no end of obligations."

"Fifty dollars a year will hardly keep you from cold and hunger."

"Still — it gives me a hope of something."

Mr. Redmond tried to remember what was his duty, under the present circumstances, but his feelings were touched. This was the young fellow who was trying to throw off his frivolity and idleness because Lorraine had ordered him to go to work. The banker knew that he ought, both as a father and a banker, to give the young man sound doctrines and moral lectures. But he did not feel in-

clined to put on a pedantic air, and he knew, besides, that, unless some few sensible ideas were already lodged in the young man's brain, ethics and economics could do nothing for him. There he sat, handsome, self-conscious, too sure of himself by half; — in fact, just the sort of youth who ought to have the nonsense knocked out of him. Yet Mr. Redmond's heart yearned over him. He felt that he must send him away and collect his own thoughts, before he committed himself. The affairs of a great banking-house are not managed on a sentimental basis.

"I'll give you an answer in a few days, Herbert," he said, kindly. "You seem to be in earnest."

"I never was so much in earnest in my life."

"Well, well, I take an interest in you; I will speak to my partners and, after discussing the matter, — in short, you shall hear. It has always been a regret to me that I had no son of my own to succeed me — but that is a hopeless regret."

They had both risen, and were looking in each other's eyes. "Had I a son of my own," pursued Mr. Redmond —

"Surely, with a daughter, sir," suggested Herbert, demurely, "with a daughter — the matter is not irremediable."

They both began to blush, then shook hands warmly.

CHAPTER XV.

A GARDEN-PARTY.

IT was Mrs. Reese's prerogative to make *la pluie ou le beau temps* at her will in her own house, and when she looked out on the morning of the mid-summer fête and saw that after a rain in the night the sky was blue, the sunshine bright, and the breeze just touched with coolness, she realized that the elements were also under her sway and answered her wishes. It takes perfect weather to insure the success of a garden-party. It must be warm enough to make the deepest recesses of the woods and shrubberies beckon and promise a delightful retreat, yet not so hot that archery and tennis seem too violent an effort. Everybody must come; enough to provide numberless couples in all the pretty nooks, saunterers down each lane and alley, yet not to de-people the lawn and balconies. This special fête had been poetically devised, and needed only the right number of people artistically dressed, full of a candid love of nature and of each other, in order to make a real idyl. Mrs. Reese had accepted all the suggestions Paul Forbes could give her, and had carried them out regardless of cost. But the great lady herself had too often experienced the ingratitude and dullness of mankind to feel sure of success.

"I know exactly how it will be," she said to her confidant and adviser, "instead of wearing light summery dresses, two-thirds of the women will come in stiff black silks. Instead of wishing to roam about and see the grounds, they will look about for chairs and benches. Then they will have a panic over the damp ground, and go huddling into the house. People always think so much of their own comfort, and refuse to enter into the spirit of the thing."

In spite of the stupidity of the world in general, Mrs. Reese was determined to play her own rôle becomingly. She wore a Watteau costume of white mull; irresistibly draped, be-looped, with a stray ribbon here and there, and a huge bunch of roses at her belt, while her head was surmounted by a co-quettish bonnet with strings of tulle tied in a knot under the left ear. She stood under an awning made of Japanese umbrellas, on the lawn, near the fountain, and there received her guests.

"Your gown surpasses everything," said Dr. Jasper, shaking hands with the great lady. "I never saw anything so beautiful. My poor little wife is a dowdy in comparison."

"I cabled for a costume for a garden-party," said Mrs. Reese, "and they sent me this, and I suppose it would be exactly *comme il faut* in Paris. But this is Sycamore Hill, and I know it is too youthful for a faded matron like myself. It needs youth and beauty to carry off this poetic sort of thing."

"Youth! beauty! nothing of the sort," replied

the gallant Doctor. "You prove that youth and beauty have got nothing to do with it."

Mrs. Reese accepted this unique tribute with much graciousness. "A gentleman should say such things," she remarked. "They do him no harm, and they serve to keep up a woman's illusions. Alas for the man whose wife's illusions are permitted to perish!" She pointed at Mr. Reese, who stood at a little distance, watching her with a sickly smile.

"He never flatters me," she said.

"Perhaps he never flatters you aloud," said the Doctor. "We husbands take it for granted that we are made of glass, and that our wives see through us, and understand what we want to say."

"Glass! that man!" said Mrs. Reese. "He is a millstone. Do you suppose he admires this dress, which you praise? Not in the least. Let me tell you something which happened on a similar occasion, Dr. Jasper, when I was younger and dressed better than I care to do now. A violet moire came out from Paris for me, — very elegant, quite superb, and nothing could be more expensive, — but, somehow, it turned my complexion just a little green, and I had my maid brighten it up with pink bows. It was absolutely perfect after it was set off by this rose-color, and I wore it to a reception where I was to receive with a cousin of mine. Mr. Reese did not arrive till late, and, naturally, as he had not seen me dressed, I looked forward to his coming to express his admiration. But, instead, he glanced at me, gave a sort of start, and retreated to the other end of the

room, and sat down as if prostrated. I tried to bear up. We wives go to a hard school, and have to learn hard lessons. I went on smiling and talking as if I were pleased; but when I was taken out to supper I chose my place so that my husband must brush past me as he entered. Finally he came; he could not go back, and he was compelled to advance, and, as he reached me, I just detained him a moment, and said playfully: 'Frederick, you have not told me how I look.' He glared at me an instant, then bent down and whispered: '*Belinda, you look like the devil!*'"

Doctor Jasper chuckled.

"That was a joke. We husbands will have our little joke."

"No, he was in earnest. Now, when we were married he would have revelled in that dress,—he had an eye for color then, and liked everything vivid and glowing. Nothing suits him now. Doctor," the feelings of the hostess overpowering those of the injured wife, "pray don't let Mrs. Jasper sit down until she has walked about and seen the arrangements. I want people to have an air of enjoying themselves."

Dr. Jasper offered his arm to his wife just in time to prevent her from relapsing into comfortable passivity in a chair, and led her down the avenue towards the clock-tower pavilion. Mrs. Reese beckoned Paul Forbes.

"Are they playing tennis?" she asked.

"Not yet."

"How dull they all seem! How they all stand

about! I wish they would look as if they were enjoying themselves."

"Yes," Paul replied, "they are too much like the chorus of an opera. I long to run about among them as the manager does and make them use their arms and legs."

"Stir them up — make everybody do something," said the great lady, whose faith in Paul Forbes's resources was becoming boundless. "And just ask Mr. Reese to step here a moment, if you please," she added. She herself was in high spirits, and wanted no clouds in her horizon, no skeletons at her feast, but there was her husband frowning, cold, and repellent. Everybody who came up to her applauded her for something; she was complimented on the charm of the weather, the greenness of the turf, the lawns, gardens, the palms and palmettoes, the lemon and orange trees, the Chinese lanterns, which hung in regular rows down each avenue and alley, fringed each summer-house and even the tower of the campanile, and the pleasure-boats on the ponds. Her daughter, too, was praised, and everybody said, "*What* an acquisition Mr. Forbes was." The great lady could smile and nod and feel some satisfaction in the thought that she was enlarging the experiences of these worthy suburban people, who had never in their lives seen anything like this. But when occasionally somebody would remark, "Mr. Reese does not look well," there was a reminder that she was mortal — that she had not got everything.

Paul Forbes rather disliked the idea of touching

Mr. Reese's shoulder, meeting the glare of that gentleman's eyes, and informing him that his wife needed him; but he nevertheless performed the required service. Mr. Reese obeyed his lady's behest with an air of reluctance and constraint.

"What is it, Belinda?" he asked. "That — that man said you wanted me."

"I do want you, — I want to ask you why you look so uncomfortable. Here I am trying to make everybody have a good time, and you spoil it all by wearing such a face." Mr. Reese's gloom deepened.

"I can't help my face," said he.

"Nonsense! The idea! You look wretched! If you were a bankrupt, with a poor useless wife and nine starving children, you couldn't look more miserable. Yet here you are, with not a care in the world, wife who —"

"Not a care in the world, ha-ha!" Mr. Reese laughed dismally as he repeated his wife's words.

"But what is the matter?"

"There's something rotten in the state of Denmark," muttered Mr. Reese, with peculiar significance in his manner.

"There, there it is again," said Mrs. Reese. "I have heard you say that twice in your sleep."

"No, I was awake, wide-awake!"

Mrs. Reese hardly knew what to make of her husband. Quoting "Hamlet" at all hours of the day and night, might be the logical result of belonging to the Shakspearian Society, however. "You might

at least tell your wife how you like her dress," she remarked, reproachfully.

"Ask Mr. Forbes for his opinion," said Mr. Reese.

"Mr. Forbes admires it extremely; so does Dr. Jasper," said Mrs. Reese. "Well, well, I suppose it is my fate never to be quite suited. But do go about among the people and be a pleasing, attractive host."

"Like Mr. Forbes, I suppose."

"Yes, — I want the party to go off well. I declare, anybody, to look at you, would say you were counting the cost, and — reflecting that you had the bills to pay."

"No, the devil's to pay," said Mr. Reese, grimly.

Luckily, perhaps, Mrs. Reese's attention had been called off, and she did not hear this unpleasant statement. She turned to greet new arrivals, and while she was telling one group of people after another that they would find a band playing by the woods, — that she desired everybody to walk about, and on no account to sit down, Mr. Reese contrived to escape. When she looked around again, her husband was gone. Paul Forbes was in sight, and, with the facility acquired by daily practice, she addressed herself to him, directing, explaining, objugating, insisting.

"I hope Peter has begun sending round the ices, Mr. Forbes. I ordered him to send round ices perpetually. I always observe when I go to people's houses that ices are never served when you want them. An ice at the right moment is delicious, at the wrong moment it is like a wet blanket. I want

everybody to have all the ices they can eat. And do they understand that the collation will not be served until seven o'clock? I suppose they are thinking of it all the time, and that is the reason they are standing about and sitting down so disconsolately. Give me your arm, Mr. Forbes, and I will walk around and tell them about the collation."

Paul offered his arm. He was sometimes a little tired of Mrs. Reese, it is true; but there could be no doubt that his and Miriam's future depended on the caprice of that rather imperious woman, and he had borne the yoke, so far, uncomplainingly. She now swooped down remorselessly upon all the idle groups within her reach, proposing tennis, archery, croquet, a row on the ponds, anything picturesque, — she cared not what. Her efforts had the result of emptying all the seats, and scattering all her guests.

"Why do not the young people flirt? In my time, young people could flirt if they could do nothing else," she remarked. "Mr. Forbes, I see Polly Chichester over by the shrubberies, looking bored, just like every one else. She is actually going to sit down on that bench. Go and tell her she must play some game."

Paul, thus released, flew across the lawn to Miss Chichester, who had taken a corner of an empty bench, and was unfurling a fan. She was dressed in sheer transparent white, and wore a white hat with a white ribbon. The only touch of color was given by a single pink rose at her throat. Ever since he had seen her come in, Paul had felt a curiosity to observe

her dress and look into her face. Her beauty was of that kind which a single glance does not take in. He was ready to make the most of this chance.

"Mrs. Reese sent me to you with her compliments," he said, quite formally.

"Did she? That is generous," said Polly. "I know that she is devoted to you."

"She did not intend me as a present. I am not even lent for an occasion. I am a mere carrier-dove. I bring a message." He had felt weary and bored, and it was with an intense feeling of relief that his eyes were riveted to the girl's face. Beautiful were the brown eyes; — the long lashes, too, were beautiful; beautiful was the pure airy forehead with the little rings of curly chestnut hair framing it; beautiful the sweet lips, the exquisite skin, and soft color. He forgot to speak.

"Well, what message?" she repeated, her frank gaze meeting his.

"Oh, yes. Mrs. Reese wants you to do something at once."

"Do what?"

"Anything. It is in the not doing that the spirit of the occasion is lost. Come, now, Miss Chichester, please do something, and at once. Your hour has struck."

"I don't in the least know what you mean. It is such a disadvantage for people to be as clever as you are, for you don't make yourself understood."

"So you never comprehend what I am driving at."

"Never. I say to myself, 'I suppose he is talking

etry or bric-à-brac,' and comfort myself in that
y."

"I see now why it is I always enjoy talking to
u."

"Yes, it is like the Boston girl who went to New
ork and who declared there was no culture in New
ork,—no conversation, no knowledge of music or
,—nothing like what she was used to. 'But
en,' said a New Yorker, 'if New York is so hope-
lessly ignorant and commonplace, why do you come
re?' 'I come here for intellectual rest,' said the
oston girl."

"That is it, exactly. With you I enjoy intellec-
tual rest," said Paul. "How is it about Mr. Archi-
ld?"

"I don't know. Mr. Archibald has this moment
me to find out how many kinds of ices there are.
told him I wished to know, to begin with, how
any I had to eat, for I wanted one of each."

"Presently he will come back and say with admir-
ble lucidity, 'Miss Chichester, there are eight kinds,
d if you eat one every half-hour you can get
rough in four hours.' And you observe that I can
lk like that when I try."

"But not so well as Mr. Archibald can."

Miriam came through the shrubberies at this
oment, and paused beside the two. She overheard
eir words and saw their faces, but they did not
serve her. She was struck by the contrast
etween the triviality of their talk and the air of
st, of intense eagerness, which characterized them

•

both. It was not alone that Polly smiled and that Paul smiled back, — there was an indefinable mirror-ing in each of the other's expression.

"What is it Mr. Archibald does so well?" Miriam asked, tranquilly. Both turned to her with an instantaneous change of expression, and it seemed to her that they both looked as if caught in the act. Paul, indeed, was conscious that he had swerved from the rôle he had appointed for himself. He experienced, in fact, just that sort of mortification a man feels who has lost his head under the influence of wine, and done or said just the foolish thing he had in his sober senses decided not to do.

"You see, Miss Reese," he said, "your mother sent me to ask Miss Chichester not to sit around in this melancholy and aimless way, but to play a game, flirt, walk, or talk. But she will do nothing until Mr. Archibald comes back."

"I don't see but that Polly fulfils her mission simply by wearing that dress," said Miriam, resolved to show nothing of what was passing in her mind. She put her hand on the girl's shoulder. "Can you see, Mr. Forbes, that this white gown is simply perfect?"

"Simply perfect!" said Paul. "Gladly would I appear before men or angels in such a guise!"

"The little bonnet, too, is a gem," pursued Miriam.

"But the rose is the crowning touch," added Paul. "*The rose speaks.*" He was now entirely at his ease. He smiled at Miriam. "Nevertheless it will not do," he went on, "to allow Miss Chichester to feel

that by assuming that gown, and fastening it at the throat with that rose, she has acquitted herself of all duties to society. She must do something. Here, Archibald, you must take Miss Chichester and play a game."

"A game?" repeated Archibald, blandly. "What game?"

"Tennis — archery — what not."

"I couldn't shoot an arrow in these clothes to save my life," said Archibald, ruefully, "nor yet hold a racquet. Will croquet do, Miss Chichester?"

Polly assented, and the two went off together. Paul Forbes did not even glance after them. "How are you getting on?" he asked Miriam, with an indefinite glance.

"I am bored to death — I always am when my mother entertains. You, at least, seem to be enjoying it."

"Do I? Let me tell you, then, that I have never in my life felt more rebellious than I have to-day," said Paul, with a new force in his glance. "If Satan were to take me up into a high mountain, and offer me all the kingdoms of the world, and the glories of them, if I would bend my knee to him, I should say, 'No, my friend, the kingdoms of the world and the glories of them would be very welcome, but I am a stubborn man, and I will bend no knee.' But what am I not doing to win a sweet, tantalizing woman? I not only bend my knee to your mother, — I let her walk on me."

"Thank you for comparing my mother to Satan,"

said Miriam, demurely. "Well, go back to her. There she is beckoning you. Go down on your knees to her—in fact, let her walk over you if she will."

Mrs. Reese was, indeed, beckoning, and beckoning most imperiously. Paul bowed to Miriam, and crossed the lawn to the great lady, slightly tossing back his head and shrugging his shoulders. He felt a sort of rage, mixed with a desire to laugh at receiving her orders. "Who and what does she take me to be?" he said to himself, alternately with, "Why should I not dance since she pays the piper?" Twenty times a day Paul was in the habit of teaching himself patience and self-restraint. "Why should I expect to have all sweet and no bitter?" he would ask himself. Life had never been a simple affair for him, and now, at the moment of his supreme opportunity, he could hardly look for a straight, fair, swift course to his goal. He was rather astonished to discover how proud he was, and how fastidious—above all, how ungrateful at such moments as these, when Mrs. Reese called him, took his arm, and paraded him about, obedient to her whims. She had felt a certain jealousy in seeing Paul speaking with animation to her daughter, who had listened with a smile at once caressing and mocking.

"When one is entertaining people, one should not waste on one what is meant for the whole," the great lady said, almost with asperity. "Just give me your arm, Mr. Forbes, and let us walk about and

everybody is having a chance for enjoyment, nothing is forgotten."

walked about together, accordingly, visiting rquéés, the ponds, the farthest off alleys, s. Reese hung on the arm of her companion, as happy as a girl. Not only did she enjoy ng man's society, but she felt, too, that he little subjugated, and this conviction inspired a more than a little coquetry. Paul was ng to find this ingredient of their intercourse embarrassing. When that magnificent head, oted by the ribbons, aigrettes, and flowers et off her bonnet, was turned towards him, saw her face soften, his heart quaked. The obedience is a fixed one — difficult to break; accustomed to do whatever Mrs. Reese ordnd what if she should command him with an e voice and indomitable glance to make love His only safety seemed to lie in amusing her, ng up a perpetual strain of entertaining talk. nent an interval of silence came, she began signs of sentiment.

dngly, Paul talked incessantly while they eir rounds, astounding his companion by his s.

how delightful you are!" she would exclaim. different from other people! You make ly else seem so dull, so lifeless!" And when ressed him in this way, and projected that

Roman profile nearer to him, he was fain to his brain for a new subject and fresh experi-

ences. As he walked about, espying cool, quiet nooks, where languid pairs were watching the shadows steal out of the coverts of the wood, he eyed such comfort and content with the despair of John Gilpin. There was Herbert Jasper, sauntering about with Lorraine Redmond; Polly Chichester was playing croquet with Archibald in an easy fashion; Edward Jasper was talking to Miriam Reese.

"Oh, why do I, and I alone, perpetually weave chains for myself? When other men are free and independent, why am I bound hand and foot in knots which I dare not undo?" Paul's thoughts were thus busy while he told Mrs. Reese about Russian customs, and described his entertainment at a great noble's house, the year before, near Moscow. Was he weaker than others? more mercenary than others?

Meanwhile the sun dropped lower; farther and farther crept the shadows over the lawns from the great oaks and chestnuts, and the guests were marshalled to supper, Mr. Reese leading the way with a lady to whom he said not a word. The whole occasion had been full of miserable significance for that gentleman, who had little of the air of a master of the feast. He had long had his suspicions. Not a day passed but that he had said to Peter, "There is something rotten in the state of Denmark"; to which significant statement Peter had agreed. He had seen his wife, in her coquettish dress, wandering about on the arm of Paul Forbes, and he began to

perate. He had never expected that at her e was likely to have a love-affair. But yes, l expected it; he had foreseen it all. The rbolt had not come out of a clear sky; the had been gathering, had loomed up threaten-only he had not fancied they would take that d shape. He wondered what he ought to do; t husbands usually did under such circum- s. He revolted at the necessity of doing any—there ought to be whirlwinds, cyclones, and uakes. He himself would fain avoid unpleas-d decided action, but was not averse to some idous catastrophe.

his mood Mr. Reese had little inclination to se civilities to his wife's guests. He kept him-alking about, perpetually seeming to be seek-ne one at a distance, whom he never found. ppened to be standing still a moment, looking lanterns, which, already lighted in the distant ries, were beginning to glow against the vs, when all at once some one addressed him, rning, he saw Paul Forbes.

ill you please take Mrs. St. John to the supper said Paul, conscious of the glare in Mr. Reese's nd preferring to be succinct. "You will find st at the end of this path."

s was maddening; but, under the circumstances, Reese felt powerfully coerced, and he obeyed. e determined to retaliate. No sooner had he en-the marquée than one of the waiters approached ad asked some trifling question, and he replied,

almost with fierceness, "Ask Mr. Forbes —not me. Mr. Forbes gives orders here."

Mr. Reese's sombre demeanor had disturbed the consciences of three people all the afternoon. It had become evident to his wife and daughter that something was on his mind,—they could hardly have guessed what it was. But to Paul there was no question what the aggressive demeanor of Miriam's father intimated. Evidently, some hint of his own presumption and Miriam's concession had come to Mr. Reese. There was one comfort in this supposition. Paul was heartily tired of hypocrisy and deceit, and he experienced a sensation of relief in the thought that the burden must shortly be lifted, and without any action of his own. He determined to put an end to his own uncertainties at least, by demanding an explanation. Accordingly, while supper was in progress, he took pains to offer some slight attentions to Mr. Reese, which might be refused if he wished to show his hostility. Mr. Reese was only too well pleased to make himself disagreeable, and Paul instantly slid his hand inside his host's arm, and drew him outside the tent,—

"Come, now," said he, with a half laugh, "I can't stand this. You can't expect me to stand it. What have I done?"

Mr. Reese trembled. He would rather evince a silent antagonism than make a distinct statement of his grievance. He was, besides, taken by surprise that his wife's favorite could summon the requisite audacity to face him so boldly.

"What have I done?" demanded Paul, still holding the other by a grip he would not relax.

"You know what you've done," said Mr. Reese.

"I come to your house at your wife's request," began Paul, "I have acted by her direction and according to her wishes."

"You — you tell me that to my face," stammered Mr. Reese.

"Why not? I am making a *catalogue-raisonnée*, — I am obliged to know about the various *objets d'art*, — I —"

"I don't believe in the catalogue at all," said Mr. Reese, stubbornly. "It is a mere cover, — a flimsy pretence. *I know what you come to the house for*," he added, in a fierce whisper.

Paul was staggered. He knew not how far to commit himself. If Mr. Reese actually suspected what his object was, he should be glad enough to avow it, — to be out of leading-strings. He determined to confess everything if need be.

"Your objection to my visits is on account of my being a poor man, I suppose," he remarked, dryly.

"On the contrary," retorted Mr. Reese, with a sort of grim humor, "your lack of means makes the whole thing more suitable. Goodness knows, she is rich enough for both."

This statement, financially accurate, and coming from such a source, ought perhaps to have been reassuring to Paul; but it was flung at him with such a weight of scorn that it hurt him like a missile. Something, too, in the expression of Mr. Reese's

face confounded and bewildered him, suggesting, as it did, painful stress of mind. However a fastidious father might feel about the claims of unequal suitors to his daughter's hand, this show of temper was exaggerated.

It seemed not only difficult but inexpedient to reply except by saying, "But if you do not object to my poverty, why do you dislike me so much? What harm do I do you?"

Mr. Reese, struggling between contending emotions, — a pent-up frenzy of jealousy, and some personal dread, for Paul still clutched his shoulder, resolved not to let him escape, — was half beside himself.

"Harm?" he repeated. "Harm? I wonder at you. They say that you have studied most things,— that you have good taste. But it is a singular good taste which induces you to come flaunting your successes in my presence, like a red rag before an angry bull. I wonder, sir, I don't fell you to the earth with one blow!" Mr. Reese was, in fact, quite carried away. "For there are morals to be preserved, sir; morals! I am aware, sir, that in Italy, where the fine arts grow, morals are little attended to, and acquirements like yours are better appreciated. But Philadelphia is different, sir, quite different; and yet, you have the assurance to ask me why I disapprove of you."

At this instant, Mrs. Reese appeared upon the scene. She had noticed the withdrawal of her husband and Paul Forbes from the supper pavilion, and

had been too anxious, not to say too curious, about what might be going on, to remain inactive.

"What is this? What is this?" she exclaimed. "How excited you look, Frederick!"

"Not in the least,—not in the least," said Mr. Reese, peevishly. "Don't make a scene, Belinda!"

"A scene? I make a scene! And when I simply want to know what is going on! Mr. Forbes, I insist upon your telling me what Mr. Reese was saying."

Having addressed her husband in vain, she turned to Paul, who had withdrawn a little and stood looking on, with the air of a man before whose perceptions familiar things are taking a new shape.

"Oh, we were having a little explanation," he answered, readily. "Since you are here, I will withdraw if you do not object." He bowed, and walked back to the *marquée*.

Mrs. Reese, left mistress of the scene, looked at her husband and tried to solve the problem of his incomprehensible behavior. "What were you saying to Mr. Forbes?" she demanded.

"Mr. Forbes will tell you."

"This is too much!" ejaculated the great lady. "Here I was having such a successful party,—my dress was so much admired, the supper was a miracle of perfection,—yet now you must go and spoil it all with your ill-temper. I never saw anybody so gloomy, so ferocious-looking! Smile! I will not have everything ruined by your abominable behavior. Smile, this instant!"

He turned towards her with a look of sickly misery.

"How can I smile while I am suffering torture?" said he.

"You must keep up appearances," said she, fluttering her fan, and looking at him archly. "There comes the crowd. Offer me your arm."

He extended his arm, but remained immovable.

"Walk down the path," commanded Mrs. Reese, and, like an automaton, he obeyed. A group of young people were just behind them. "Say 'How pretty the lanterns look, dearest,' say it loud," whispered Mrs. Reese.

"How pretty the lanterns look, dearest," quavered Mr. Reese, in a voice of anguish, as they passed a cluster of people, to whom the great lady nodded and smiled triumphantly. Having thus carried off the situation, and presented a fair outside to the public, she was the better prepared to sustain the full ordeal. The two went on and on, seeking for a hidden place, as if they were a pair of lovers. But the Chinese lanterns penetrated even the densest thickets; couples were rambling everywhere, seeking novel and picturesque effects, and it was some time before the husband and wife could gain the coveted seclusion. They finally took their station on the bridge which crossed the brook between the ponds.

"Now, what were you saying to Mr. Forbes?" demanded Mrs. Reese, dropping conventions, and looking at the culprit like a judge.

"He asked me why I objected to him," faltered Mr. Reese.

"And pray, why should you object to him? He's a scholar and a gentleman. He's an ornament to any society."

Mr. Reese felt desperate. He dreaded his wife's anger inexpressibly, but, cornered, as it were, in this way, and with no chance of escape, he used the courage of his desperation. "I think it's a shame," he began, with vehemence. "I think it's outrageous! — you're a married woman, and married women ought not to do such things. You may not be satisfied with me; you may consider me dull, commonplace, stupid; you may want something more romantic; — but it isn't right; it isn't allowed — not here. That's what I told him; such things may go on in Italy, — I've heard that when landlords rent houses there they tell the lady, as an inducement, that there's a secret staircase. But I want no secret staircases, madam."

Mrs. Reese listened, aghast. She found it scarcely credible that, with her own eyes and ears, she was taking in the looks and words of a man in a jealous frenzy. She had always longed to make her husband jealous; but it was distinctly unpleasant to be glared at in this way, while he hissed into her ears his horrible, his detestable insinuations.

"Do you mean to say that you made any observation about secret staircases to that young man?" she faltered.

"I certainly did, madam." Mr. Reese, at first paralyzed by the necessities of the situation, now began to command it. "And why should I not? I

am your lawful husband. It is true, you have no love for me, — no sympathy for me. You are ashamed to take me about with you; you go to Europe and leave me behind in that dreary house," cried the poor man, giving vent to the heaped-up wrongs and bitternesses of his soul. "You tell me nothing about your plans. You despise me, no doubt, for being poor. I suppose you wish me dead, so that you might marry another man. But, all the same, I'm your husband, and I have my rights. And one of my rights is to shoot the man who comes trying to win you away from me."

Mrs. Reese was profoundly agitated. Little tremors and thrills ran over her; she could hardly tell whether of pain or pleasure. This was indeed a strange crisis in a woman's existence. She had read of such things with curiosity and almost longing, — but she had never expected that her own blood would ever run cold at her husband's threats against the life of her putative lover. She uttered an ejaculative expression of alarm.

"I shall kill him just as I would an insect," said Mr. Reese, whose courage rose every moment.

"But it isn't so, it isn't so, Frederick," faltered Mrs. Reese, catching hold of her husband's arm. "I am not a false wife. I cannot imagine how you could believe that under any circumstances, with no matter what temptations, I should be anything save strictly virtuous. Why, such suspicions are too dreadful! And to talk about secret staircases! I shall be ashamed to look the young man in the face."

"You ought to be ashamed," said Mr. Reese, seeing his power. "And I'll not have him creeping up to your boudoir day after day, and you sitting there and receiving him in the most beautiful dresses."

"He is making me a catalogue," insisted Mrs. Reese. "I asked him to do it. I shall pay him for it."

"That's what he said, — that he was making a catalogue for you. I told him, as I tell you, that it is all a pretence."

"He gives me lessons in art," Mrs. Reese went on, almost in tears. "I pay him for every hour he comes."

"I've no doubt you pay him — pay him handsomely. But I can't and won't have it go on. These doublings and twistings are of no use. First it's a catalogue, — then it's lessons. Do you think me blind? Do you think me an idiot?"

"Good gracious!" said Mrs. Reese, everything pressing upon her at once. "They have begun to dance." For the sound of waltz music rising and falling came plaintively down the alleys to them. "Frederick, for heaven's sake!" — She turned towards her husband, saw his pale distorted face and stopped. "I don't know what you mean," she faltered, soft relentings and unfamiliar tendernesses coming over her. "Tell me what all this means."

"You used to be kind to me, — you used to be fond of me," said he; "now, you only think of him. It is Mr. Forbes here, and Mr. Forbes there, — up-


stairs, — downstairs. He governs the house. You're in love with him."

"I'm not in love with him." She had a feeling that this was one of the romantic moments of life which she had dreamed of and longed for ; she experienced a pleasant sense of contrition, and, if there had been ample leisure, might have enjoyed confession and absolution. But at this instant what she experienced most fully was a wild impatience to get back to her guests and control what was going on.

Mr. Reese caught hold of her wrist. "You know that you gave up going to Europe this summer simply on his account," said he.

These words spoke to her soul. She knew in her secret heart that she did care too much for Paul Forbes, — but oh, innocently, quite innocently. But how to convince her husband ! If she had time, she might tell him that she had believed him to be indifferent, — that any thought of her hung light in his scales, far from balancing even the least beloved of his folio Shakspeares. But at this moment what she wanted was to get back to her guests, — and she longed for some plausible excuse to free her from marital importunities. It was delightful to be convinced that he was still passionately enamored of her, and wildly jealous, — still, if the climax could but be postponed.

"I may have seemed to take up with others," she said, solemnly ; "but there is only one man I care for."



"Do you mean me? I thought you had despised me ever since you became a rich woman."

"I never changed. It was you who changed."

"Changed? Not I!"

And still the music went on in long, sighing cadences, — her own music, paid for with her own money, and piping to dancers whom she had invited.

"Promise me he shall be sent away," implored Mr. Reese, then stopped at the sound of approaching footsteps. Down the half-lighted alley, under the umbrageous arches, between the two rosy lines of the lanterns, came a couple arm-in-arm; two dancers who had left the pavilion and strayed off to enjoy the coolness. Mrs. Reese recognized them at once; it was Paul Forbes and her daughter Miriam. She seized the incident on the instant as a bridge to carry her over the present dilemma.

"Did you see who it was?" she asked her husband, as the two passed by, taking the path along the sides of the pond. "Don't you see, — don't you understand? I want Mr. Forbes to marry Miriam."

"Eh?" muttered Mr. Reese. "Mr. Forbes marry Miriam?"

"Yes, what could be better?" The idea, having presented itself to Mrs. Reese's mind, conquered her at once. She felt that it was not only the solution of a painful difficulty, but an admirable scheme, which must be carried out at any cost. "He is the very man for Miriam. I have tested him all through. He may be poor, but what of that? I have money enough. It is the dearest wish of my heart."

Mr. Reese fairly tottered. What could be more plausible, what could be more sensible. Even in his most poignant moments of jealousy, he had wondered a little at the young man's choice of a woman so much his senior. It was really singular that, with a youthful and not unattractive daughter in the house, he had overlooked her in such a matter. His own angry suspicions, however, showed that he was not weak, and he was rather pleased with the part he had played. His injuries as a husband, which five minutes before seemed incurable, were instantly soothed.

"Why, yes," said he, thoughtfully. "I don't see why he should not make a very good husband for Miriam, so long as you furnish the money."

"Yet you had suspicions of —"

"Forgive my suspicions, Belinda. They were natural."

"And do you actually care about me?"

"I adore you."

"But we must go back," said the great lady, yielding for an instant to her husband's embrace. "I want to see what is going on." She took her husband's limp arm, and walked him off at a brisk step.

Half an hour later, as Paul Forbes was standing watching the crowd of charming girls swaying to the waltz music, like flowers to the wind, and was pondering for the twentieth time exactly what it was that Mr. Reese had meant, he felt a touch on his shoulder, and, turning, found himself face to face with that individual.

"I owe you an apology, Mr. Forbes," said he, with a smile on his lips, even a sparkle in his eye. "I owe you a thousand apologies. You asked, me, sir, why I objected to you. The fact is, I don't object to you — I think highly of you."

"That's pleasant news," said Paul. "I hope I deserve your good opinion." They shook hands warmly, and twice more before the evening came to an end, the same conversation was repeated. "I hope you're not offended with me," Mr. Reese finally added.

"Oh, on the contrary," said Paul, "I'm pleased — I'm enormously pleased."

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CHAPTER XVI.

A RICH WOMAN.

MRS. REESE held her own intellect in too high esteem to believe that trivial accidents and insignificant after-thoughts had anything to do with her exercise of will. Having said that she wanted Paul Forbes for her son-in-law, every other idea connected with him fell instantly to unimportance, and was as if it had had no existence.

"He is clever — he is a genius," she said to herself. "He is just the husband for Miriam."

She had been in the habit of talking a great deal about her daughter. She had told Paul the whole story of Miriam's many offers, and her one love-affair. All this had been a clear preparation, and he must have seen, as in a magic mirror, his own figure in the place of the future son-in-law of his patroness. So fast did the great lady's wishes travel, her imagination keeping up with them, that by the following day, when she sat expecting her morning visitor, her mind was so busy with the future that she remembered little or nothing of what had gone on the day before.

Paul Forbes, on the contrary, retained a lively consciousness of Mr. Reese's singular behavior when he presented himself at the door. He remembered,

too, that he had committed himself as to his intentions regarding Miriam, and almost expected to find himself denied entrance. On the contrary, Peter swung wide the portal, with a frank air of hospitality he had never before worn. In fact, the butler had more than shared his master's suspicions; he was, indeed, at the root of them. Mr. Reese's first duty had been to inform him how the mystery had been cleared up. Paul could not help entering with some flourish, with the butler bowing, and smiling, and summoning his subordinate to lead the way to Mrs. Reese's boudoir. Mr. Reese came out of the library and shook hands with the young man, who experienced a mingling of vexation and relief. Yesterday both master and man had been cold—absolutely hostile. In a day, an hour,—almost a minute,—the coldness had vanished, and had left no trace. He could but wonder what was in reserve for him upstairs.

Mrs. Reese met him with a radiant air.

"Our party was a success, was it not?" said she, with expansive ease and friendliness. "Now, I have given a great many parties; and, although they have cost a lot of money, they have not in general been very successful. I never before had you to put spirit into the affair."

"Oh, I had nothing to do with it," said Paul. "The day was pleasant, and most people were in a good humor."

"I was in a good humor myself," said Mrs. Reese. "It makes a great deal of difference whether the

hostess is in a good humor. Now, it was you who put me in a good humor — you always do.”

Paul was divided between a desire to laugh and to gnash his teeth. The great lady was nodding and smiling at him with the utmost condescension, not to say tenderness.

“The worst of such things is the money they cost,” he remarked. “The worst of everything is the money it costs. My idea of society is a congenial coterie who do not require to be tempted into gluttony, fiddled to, and amused by lanterns and fireworks. Yet when one does not have to pay for it, it is very pleasant to over-eat, be fiddled to, and watch a feast of lanterns.”

“I don’t mind the expense,” said Mrs. Reese. “That is, I don’t mind it when I feel that I am getting my money’s worth. I am a rich woman, Mr. Forbes.”

She accompanied this statement with a glance which rather overpowered him; but he contrived to say, “I have heard so.”

“I may say,” she went on, the meaning of her fixed gaze deepening, “that I am a very rich woman.”

“I knew it the moment I came into your house,” said Paul, laughing. “In your vestibule stand two magnificent Hindoo temple lamps, each of which cost more money than I possess; — your hall is lined with rich vases numerous and big enough to hold the forty thieves: everywhere under the feet are thick Persian rugs, and the walls of all the rooms are hung with masterpieces.”

"I know, — I know," and Mrs. Reese's breast swelled with pride at this inventory of her wealth. "But yet I shall have to die some time."

"That does seem to be the universal law. Even great kings have to lay down their magnificence, and exchange, as somebody said, —

' My great kingdom for a little grave,
A little, little grave,—an obscure grave.' "

"Oh, don't, — don't," murmured Mrs. Reese. "Pray don't; I come of a long-lived family myself. Some of my ancestors lived to be past ninety. Still, of course, everything must come to an end eventually. And Miriam will succeed me."

She looked at Paul so eagerly, her curiosity regarding the effect of her daughter's name was so naïve, that he smiled. "Yes, you have a daughter," said he, in a kind, tranquil way. "It is a great deal for a rich woman to have a child of her own."

His face was quiet; — it expressed, to her perceptions, dignity and strength, and, at the same time, a patience and subordination which she liked. His eyes had dilated at the sound of Miriam's name. She was certain that he was not unmoved.

"If Miriam would only marry to suit me," she went on, "I should be ready to do a great deal for her husband. I used to think he must be a man of rank, — but what is so foolish as for republicans like ourselves to want to build up and perpetuate what our ancestors flung away their lives for the sake of getting rid of? I would rather have her marry a

man of talent, of refinement,—one who would not spend my money on four-in-hands and steam yachts. What should you be ambitious for if you were rich, Mr. Forbes?"

He sat back in his chair, folded his arms, and looked at her unsmilingly. "I should like to be myself," said he. "If I were rich, I should like to put by trivial and unmeaning tasks: to be free to say and do what is in me without being bent double by conformity."

She looked at him with surprise. She was struck by the melancholy of his face.

"I am afraid it would not improve you, then, to be rich," she said, with an air of disappointment.

"I could be a better man if I were rich," Paul went on, as if he had not heard her. "I could be a better man, a truer friend, a more devoted lover. My beliefs would be deeper; I should be moored fast. I have worked hard, you see; I have tried to be honest and to do the best that is in me; but my poverty has impoverished much of my work, and disenchanted the worker."

"You must marry a rich girl," said Mrs. Reese, leaning forward and putting her hand on his arm.

"Ah," he murmured, looking at her with a peculiar smile, "I fear you are a dangerous adviser."

"Why should you not marry a rich girl?" persisted Mrs. Reese. "I declare, Mr. Forbes, when I think of what young men are, and compare them with you, they seem a different species altogether. I could tell you what they are. At one of my parties

I was passing through a room where three of them were sitting, and I heard one say, 'There's that old woman — I suppose we must get up and speak to her.' Another answered, 'Let's pretend not to see her.' That's the kind of aspirant a rich woman is asked to give her daughter to."

"They are not all like that."

"Some of them are worse, — they're hypocrites. And they all smoke in a lady's face. Heaven preserve me from knowing what more they do. I don't think you need feel modest about marrying a rich girl, Mr. Forbes. Had I twenty daughters, you should have your pick among them."

Paul colored scarlet, and sprang to his feet.

"Ah, dear madam!" he muttered, too embarrassed to utter another word, and bowed almost to the floor.

Having laid in this seed, the great lady began to ask questions and fill up all gaps in her acquaintance with his past; the names of his parents, his father's occupation, his present relations and connections.

"Good heavens!" thought Paul, "she is examining me."

CHAPTER XVII.

FATHER AND SON.

HERBERT JASPER walked into the Doctor's office, where his father sat reading a newspaper, one morning near the end of July — shut the door, took a seat, and remarked gently, —

"I suppose, sir, you will be glad to hear that I have got something to do."

"It depends upon what it is," grumbled the Doctor, taken by surprise, a good deal pleased, yet showing no feeling except reluctance to believe any especial good of his offspring.

"It is not a lofty position," Bertie remarked, sitting down, crossing his legs, and folding his arms.

"I did not suppose you would be made president of the Pennsylvania Railroad to start off with."

"No. The salary is not great, — it is, in fact, one hundred and fifty dollars a year."

"I consider that a handsome sum for a son of mine to make," said the Doctor, with a grim smile. "I had no idea your abilities would command a salary of that amount."

"Yes, I flatter myself I am doing pretty well. I hear that, where I am, most fellows begin with fifty."

The Doctor laid down his paper, put aside his spectacles, and looked at his son, whose attitude

seemed to indicate an intention to take time and talk things over.

"Most fellows begin with fifty, do they?" said he.

"Yes, sir."

"I dare say a man might support life on fifty dollars a year,—that is, in a tropical country, where he merely wore a girdle, and lived on figs and bananas; but I don't precisely see how he could do it in this climate."

"No, *I* don't exactly," responded Bertie, in a speculative tone, "unless he had a private income, or his father helped him."

"Fathers are a convenience — no doubt of that."

"Yes, I suppose fathers have to take certain facts into account," Bertie remarked, in an off-hand way. "I realize, sir, that I have already cost you a good deal of money, and that it may be some little time before I can support myself. But, nevertheless, I want to ask a little more assistance than you have so far given me. Will you be good enough to tell me definitely what you can afford to do for me until I can earn some few thousands a year?"

Dr. Jasper stiffened himself against the back of his chair, and looked waggishly at the self-possessed young fellow.

"With a salary of a hundred and fifty dollars, what more can you want?" said he.

"That might cover my railway expenses. In fact, it might do if I continued to live here, and wore out my old clothes."

"Of course it might. I assure you a hundred and

fifty dollars would be a good deal of money for me to spend on myself in the course of a year. By the bye, where is your place of business?"

"In Philadelphia."

"Oh, you'd better go on living at home. Don't set up a bachelor establishment on that income."

"I don't intend to set up a bachelor establishment," said Bertie. "The truth is, I wish to marry."

"Marry? What do you mean! Nonsense!"

"I won't go on beating about the bush. I want to marry, father; and whether I can marry or not depends on how much you are willing to do for me."

"The idea of your marrying! I never heard such — nonsense in my life. Why, how old are you?"

"Almost twenty-five."

"The thing is absurd — it's incredible, — it's impossible. Why, you must suppose I'm made of treacle, — that I am a gingerbread parent, — that all you have got to do is to put me in your mouth and eat me. And you've kept it a secret, — a secret from your own mother, who worships you; — I know you haven't breathed a hint of it to her, for she would have told me in an hour. I declare it's indecent. How long have you been engaged?"

"But I'm not engaged yet," said Bertie. A little color had risen to his forehead; otherwise he showed no sign of excitement. "Of course, not being independent, I had to speak to you before committing myself to — the lady. When I am actually engaged I shall not wait a moment before telling my mother."

"You'd better not commit yourself," growled the Doctor. "A man can't marry on a hundred and fifty dollars a year. The idea of you going in for such a piece of downright folly. It's just like Edward, — but I thought you were wiser. Who is the girl?"

"You see, father, I am not engaged yet. I have not made an offer."

"Somebody you met in Europe, I suppose."

"No, sir."

"Somebody you knew at college, before you went abroad."

"No, sir."

"Somebody you've seen since you came home."

"Yes, sir."

The Doctor was keen on the scent. His eyes sparkled.

"You don't mean that it's somebody at Sycamore Hill?"

"Yes, sir," said Bertie, and he smiled faintly, just disclosing his handsome teeth beneath his well trimmed brown moustache.

"Don't guess," he added. "Honestly, I think you will not disapprove. You yourself settled early in life. And I have got a very fair opening. You did not ask me where it was, father. But Mr. Redmond has given me a desk."

"Redmond!" exclaimed the Doctor, sharply. "Redmond and Redmond."

"Yes, sir. I begin with a hundred and fifty, but Mr. Redmond is so good as to give me a clear intimation that, if I show a capacity for steady work, I may expect a *speedy* rise."

The Doctor was staggered.

"Why," said he, reluctantly, "that's an amazing piece of good-fortune, — amazing! I should never have ventured to propose it to him, good friends although we are! Why, there was Hazelhurst offered to put in any amount they asked, if John could only have a stool, — that was only two months ago, — and they declared they were overcrowded already."

A faint smile flickered across Bertie's lips; his eyes showed a momentary flash. "It is an amazing hit you have made," said the Doctor. He did not often smoke, but he felt excited and upset, and wanted a sedative, so crossed over to his desk, took a cigar, and lighted it. "Now," said he, "if you stick to it, Bertie, and show some energy, your fortune is made. But I'm afraid you'll be like Edward, — get sick of the routine, and throw up the place."

"No, sir," answered Bertie. "I've got as many inclinations and as much fastidiousness as most men, I suppose; but when I go into business, I shall not take them along with me. It is very pleasant being subject to caprices at the right moment, but he must be a man born for failure who allows himself the luxury of caprices at the wrong moment."

"Good heavens!" said the Doctor, "he talks like the seven sages of Greece! Is that the way you got round Redmond?"

"No, sir. I did not theorize with him; merely proffered my request, and said I meant to work hard."

The Doctor was puffing away at his cigar; but

either nicotine, poppy, nor mandragora could have soothed the excitement in his veins. He wished his life was present. He could not collect his thoughts; he mistrusted his own intuitions. He looked at his son with pride that such a handsome specimen of the human kind owed his existence to himself. Yet, at the same time, he realized that this clean-limbed, high-stepping youth was an expensive trophy from fortune, and had broached some dangerous requests.

"Will you promise not to tell, if I confide the name of the girl to you, father?" asked Bertie. "You might understand Mr. Redmond's position better."

"You don't mean that it's one of the Redmond girls?"

"*One* of the Redmond girls!" said Bertie, nettled. "As if it could be anybody but Lorraine."

"Lorraine! You want to marry Lorraine Redmond?"

"I do, sir."

"She won't have you. She'll never have you."

Bertie smiled, tranquilly. "I confess that she has not yet promised to have me."

"She will laugh you to scorn."

"Wait a little. I don't mean to seem a conceited coxcomb; but, on my word, I think well enough of myself to believe that the girl I woo I shall win."

"You're good-looking, — you're good-looking, — but such things don't weigh with Lorraine. She's run away with by all sorts of ideas!"

"I mean that she shall be run away with by one."

"She's the last woman on earth I should have thought of your admiring."

"She's the first."

"She can be a little fiery on occasions."

"I like fire."

The Doctor was immensely tickled. He longed to be in Mr. Reese's study sipping Madeira, after a meeting of the Shakspeare Society, and telling Dr. Chichester and the others about "that boy of mine."

"You have not yet answered my question, father," said Bertie. "Can I feel free to ask Lorraine to marry me, — certain that she will have a roof over her?"

"Don't allow any mercenary considerations to intrude into your love-affair," said the Doctor. "I don't think there's any doubt but that, supposing she accepts you, — which she won't do, — Redmond and I will provide something for our babes in the wood. But, by the way, you've consulted him. What did he say?"

"No, sir, — I have not gone to him yet about Lorraine. I shall speak first to her."

"But I inferred that he gave you the place on account of —"

"I think he did," said Bertie, demurely; "I was quite certain he understood all about it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEAR LADY DISDAIN.

NOBODY had ever taught Lorraine that she must ask herself what a young man means by certain attentions, and examine her own conscience sternly. Accordingly, she was drifting quite insensibly towards the swift currents and rapids of a love-affair, quite without knowledge or warning of what was sure to come. Her sisters were too much engrossed in things unseen to have observation for what came under their eyes; and Mr. Redmond himself was exquisitely discreet. Lorraine had a habit of prompt decision; and whatever she decided was unimportant shrank to nothingness, and did not enter into her calculations at all. When Bertie was occasionally "ridiculous," she thought the circumstance over,—remembered that it is almost impossible instantly to eradicate tendencies, and that there is almost always some survival of instinct,—just, for example, as a dog or a cat, before settling to a nap, treads down an imaginary bed of grass or leaves, such as its remote progenitor made in the forest. Bertie still exhibited little meaningless aptitudes which had belonged to his immature period. In fact, his babyish habit of dependence, his need of herself, came from his grow-

ing sense of emptiness within, which, not unnaturally, made itself felt as his actual life widened. There were few outlets to his habits and tastes where Lorraine had not by this time asserted herself. She had made him give up smoking, and was now attacking his conscience on the subject of wine.

"I don't care particularly about smoking," Bertie told her. "I shouldn't care about it at all, if you would always take a walk with me or sit and talk when I wanted a cigar. I just take it to jog myself, and say 'You stupid owl, wake up.' Now I infinitely prefer that *you* should wake me up."

"But you should not need waking up."

"But people are so confoundedly dull,—all but you. Paul Forbes used to like to talk,—but he's gone away, and if I go to his rooms I either don't find him, or he's deep in his work. My father is so sarcastic that it is as pleasant talking to him as walking on razors, and my mother is apt to be doing something else when I feel like talking. So when I feel sleepy, I smoke, unless I can come to you."

"Come to me, then, whenever you choose," said Lorraine, with decision. "I'm not very busy nowadays."

Bertie took the invitation in a large sense, and came. He had fixed a date for the time of his offer of marriage to Lorraine, and held himself in check, determined to mar nothing by haste.

What he waited for was to have been at work a fortnight; after such an ordeal by fire, he felt sure that he was worthy of some compensations. He

d asked Lorraine to walk with him on that particular day — that is, he had said he would stroll over, and it would be delightful if they could go through the woods and see the sunset from the hill.

Lorraine assented; she would be on the tennis-ground at five o'clock, she said, and they could start from there. She was reading when he approached, and, looking up, she saw something a little unusual, — something almost a little dazzling in the young man's appearance. He wore a light suit of gray; but that hardly accounted for the brilliancy of his glance, and an indefinable something in his whole mien. Another sense came to her aid, since her eyes could not exactly make out in what the difference lay.

"Oh, Bertie!" she exclaimed, with strong disapproval. "You have been smoking."

"Only a cigarette."

"Oh, but you promised. And, besides, you were coming to me, — and what did you tell me, — that if I would only walk with you, and talk with you, you never cared to smoke."

"Oh, forgive it this time, there's a good girl."

"But tobacco is so bad, — it promotes stoicism, insensibility, — the whole man grows callous to outside impressions."

Bertie came close to Lorraine, —

"Forgive it this time," he said, very softly. "Come, now."

He took her book from her hand, and laid it down on the bench.

"I ought to refuse to go."

"But you would not do that."

Lorraine's face showed a certain indignation; but she drew on her long gloves, raised her parasol, and the two set out, taking their way across the lower lawn, skirting the garden, and then entering Mrs. Reese's woods.

"I suppose I wanted an interval of luxury and comfort," said Bertie. "Think of what I do,—getting up every day at seven o'clock, making myself the butt of the elements, encountering thunder, lightning, and rain; sitting all day on a stool, and doing whatever I'm ordered, without lifting an eyebrow. Even you might grant me a cigarette once a week."

"I don't believe in that sort of comfort," said Lorraine. "And I do so abhor tobacco in any shape, and they say that cigarettes are more pernicious even than cigars. Still, I will forgive you this once,—but don't have any more lapses. It may encourage you to hear that papa says you really do very well, and that Mr. Elkins says you go to work in the right way. I suppose if one is a business man, one should be a good business man. Still, it does not seem to me the highest career."

"No, you want a man to be on a pillar, above the world,—a St. Simeon Stylites, and all that."

"On the contrary, I don't in the least believe in pillars. I want a man to live right in the midst of breathing, suffering humanity, and spend his strength in helpful work, not in silent endurance."

Bertie wondered to himself whether his present occupations brought him up to Lorraine's mark.

"What sort of a man should you look up to, now?" he asked. "What sort of a man should you —" he broke off. "What sort of a man is your ideal?" he finished, putting his question differently.

"I admire any one who does good work in the world, — from a blacksmith up to Bismarck or Gladstone."

"Oh, I say, — don't you think Gladstone is a sort of an old woman?"

"Gladstone is an honest man; — he takes himself rather too seriously, perhaps."

"Seriously! I should think he did, — attributes his success in life to the fact that he has always given thirty-two chews to his meat, doesn't he? Not but that I think there is something in it. A man who has patience to chew his food according to rule must have patience to bide his time and get whatever he wants."

"Bismarck is the great man of the epoch," Lorraine now remarked, judicially.

"Oh, yes, I grant that. But then, Lorraine," he turned towards her and smiled, "you couldn't very well expect to marry either Gladstone or Bismarck."

"Marry?" said Lorraine, "I thought we were talking sensibly. Now, to my mind, Agassiz lived a very worthy life."

"Oh, no doubt. I am not in that line myself, and I hate fish out of water and all manner of creeping

and crawling things. I don't believe you would have liked him as an inmate."

"What a trivial way of looking at it," exclaimed Lorraine, impatiently. "Don't you understand that every new specimen a naturalist classifies,—every fossil he finds to establish a link between periods,—is an addition to our stock of knowledge."

"Of course," Bertie yielded, but with a deadly grudge against naturalists, all the same. "I confess it does not seem to me a wonderful end of existence to go about hammering at rocks and finding a profound and mystical revelation in the print of a bird's foot, or a winged fish. No doubt, these people get some curious information, and are able to make better guesses about what went on in the various upheavals than I could. I suppose that nature's first epic was written in earthquakes and volcanoes, and alternations of heat and cold, lava and ice. But, after all, nature's forces blindly at work make a dismal sort of chaos. I don't want to enter it, even in imagination, and I would rather have Homer's Iliad than a treatise on fossil fishes. I like the epic after man took it out of nature's hand."

Lorraine had been following Bertie's words with a cherubic smile. "Bertie," she now exclaimed, in a voice which seemed to the young man the sweetest music he had ever heard in the world, "sometimes you surprise me,—that is, I mean, sometimes you give me a delightful surprise."

"I am very glad. You leave me to infer that I sometimes surprise you the other way."

"Now and then it actually seems to me that you are clever, that you have thought about the mystery of things,—that you are almost wise. But I confess you always spoil the impression afterwards."

"Oh, I have thought a good deal about living, and what it is worth while to put into one's life," said Bertie. "Men grind away at what is not a necessity of life to them,—not the least of an amusement, and no especial distinction, and never seem to get to living."

"I should really like to know what you regard as the ideal life," said Lorraine, fixing her brilliant eyes on her companion. "I suppose you have decided what you should like to gain."

"Indeed I have. I know to a nicety what I want."

"What is it?" asked Lorraine, eagerly.

They had reached the end of the wood, and before them were spread out wide wheat-fields, newly harvested, and now being gleaned by flocks of black-birds. These fields sloped down to a tiny streamlet with densely thicketed banks, and on the other side the hills began.

"Sit down," said Bertie. "This is a good place to watch the sunset. That stubble will be stiff to walk over."

"Very well, let us sit down on this log," said Lorraine, with energy. "You know you were going to describe your ideal life."

"With all my heart," said Bertie, sitting down beside her, and bracing himself against the trunk of an

oak. "There is a little Queen Anne cottage going up not far from the station. It is a delightful little house, charmingly arranged; a fine view from the parlor windows, a comfortable library, and a good dining-room. Every time I go past it, which is twice a day, I say to myself 'I should like to live there.'"

Lorraine had listened with an air of disdain.

"So that is your ideal of life, is it? To live in a Queen Anne cottage, with a view from the parlor window, a comfortable library, and a good dining-room."

"That is the background of my ideal existence," said Bertie. "Living there would naturally include more essential things."

"And what are the essential things?"

"If," said Bertie, demurely, "if, in the fulness of my heart, I disclose my dearest ambitions, you promise not to be shocked or angry?"

"I shall promise nothing," declared Lorraine. "I feel some curiosity about the affair; for, so far, what you have said about your ambition does seem the very silliest thing I ever heard in all my life."

"That does not sound very encouraging. Of course," here Bertie's voice fell to a whisper, "of course I have no idea of living in that Queen Anne cottage all alone."

"With whom, then?"

"With my wife," said Bertie, with a crimson face.

"Your wife?" echoed Lorraine, incredulously.

"Yes, my wife."

"I never heard that you were married."

"I am not; but *I shall be before I take that house.*"

"You are engaged, I suppose?"

"Well, not quite; I hope I'm well on the road to it."

"Oh," said Lorraine. She drew back a little, and her face lost color. She was evidently startled, and showed some signs of displeasure; at least, she put on a different demeanor, and stiffened slightly from head to foot. She was evidently pondering the subject, and the first sign of her mental conflict was the promulgation of this logical inference. "It is somebody you met in Europe — somebody I don't know," she remarked. "Ah, well, I suppose there must be marrying and giving in marriage, only I certainly had never supposed you were one of those men who settle down before they know their needs and their own minds. But don't imagine I begrudge you your ideal existence in the Queen Anne cottage, with its view from the parlor window, its comfortable library, and convenient dining-room. But mark my words, the moment you are fixed there you will begin to deteriorate."

"Oh, no; on the contrary, —"

"You will deteriorate," insisted Lorraine. "You cannot help it; you will make yourself a comfortable nook, and smoke, and commit all sorts of self-indulgences. You will live in the world and for the world, married to a fashionable girl. You can't help deteriorating. I know what girls are."

"But how do you know I want to marry a fashionable girl?"



"You met her in Europe; and only a fashionable girl would be likely to attract you."

"But I did not meet her in Europe, and — she is not a fashionable girl. She is just as fresh, as spontaneous, as original, as that flower," and he pointed to a white waxy blossom growing at the foot of an oak-tree.

"Oh, that sort of a sickly, puny thing — no ideas!" said Lorraine, with scorn.

"I never saw anybody with so many ideas," pursued Bertie. "She is educated like an Oxford professor, and has the most exalted views; in fact, she has gone not only to the heights but to the bottom of things. There was never anybody like her."

Lorraine felt an intense exasperation at Bertie's belief that he had chosen such a piece of perfection.

"I hope she is six feet high, and as commanding in person as in intellect," said she, tartly.

"Indeed, she is quite petite — a regular little fairy."

Lorraine had a conviction of her own dulness: she did not seem to be able to put two and two together at all.

"You met her before you went to Europe?" she now said.

"No; since my return. Our acquaintance is short."

Lorraine fumbled after a coherent thought.

"It is not Polly, I suppose?" she ventured.

"Certainly not Polly."

"Nor Miriam?"

“Nor Miriam.”

Lorraine was intensely serious; she felt an unutterable scorn for the unknown; but she had to battle with her curiosity, which, trivial as it was, was relentless. Knowing so much, she must know more.

“Is she pretty?” she asked, despising herself for the question.

Bertie’s face shone; his eyes were full of light.

“To my mind,” said he, “she is the prettiest creature in the whole world!”

“Oh!” cried Lorraine, fairly stung to scorn, “if you are as absurd as that,—as utterly ridiculous and absurd as that,—go marry her, then! Go live in your Queen Anne cottage! I wash my hands of you!”

“I am ready the moment she takes me. But I have not asked her yet.”

“But why don’t you ask her?”

“I love her so dearly,—it all means so much to me,—that I am half afraid to risk my whole happiness on one little word of hers. She is young; she is not sentimental, like most girls, and I don’t think she knows quite how much it costs a man to feel what I feel for her. Besides, she is my superior.”

“Oh, don’t be afraid,” said Lorraine. “Shakespeare says:—

“‘She’s beautiful, and therefore to be woo’d,
She is a woman, and therefore to be won.’”

I always resented that; but you are a man, and may as well gather what crumbs of comfort you can out

of the fancy that women may be had for the asking. Let me encourage you." Lorraine's face showed a certain emotion. She felt angry, agitated, restless; but had a sense, above all, of her own impotence.

"Encourage me all you can," cried Bertie. "I don't believe I'm wholly a coward, but the fact that I want this girl for my wife so deeply — that I live for her and in her so entirely — makes me timid."

Lorraine felt the bondage of his glance. She was indignant that he should be imposing his confessions upon herself.

"Don't stay here, I beg," said she. "If I were you, I should go to her instantly and settle the matter somehow."

"You advise me to do it?"

"I only know that were I a man, I should put an end to a state of mind as trying as yours, and either be accepted or refused."

Bertie seized her hands, and looked down into her startled face. "Lorraine," said he, "dearest, sweetest Lorraine, — I love you! Will you consent to be my wife?"

Lorraine stared back at him in amazement, at first indignant at his presuming to put her in his sweetheart's place; then, gradually, it flashed across her perceptions that he had been talking about her all the time. For she felt — she could not help feeling — that he could not look at her in this way unless he loved her.

"Me?" she exclaimed, forcibly. "Did you mean *me*?"

"Darling, yes. Whom else should I mean?"

"It is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard in my life," said Lorraine, fiercely. "It is like a thing in a foolish book. I cannot believe that you are in earnest, —" She had at first forgotten to draw her hands away from him — but now flung him off, and retreated to the end of the log on which they sat. That was not far enough, and she sprang up, her color wavering between white and scarlet, her breath coming in little pants.

"In earnest!" repeated Bertie, reproachfully, "when you must long ago have seen that I loved you with my whole heart."

"He says he loves me with his whole heart," said Lorraine, raising her eyes as if addressing a higher power. "He was uttering those absurdities about me, — *me!*"

"Laugh at me as much as you like," said Bertie, approaching her. "Only listen to me and believe me."

"I will not listen, and to believe in you is to credit you with folly. I should like to know one thing, and one thing only," said Lorraine, her voice deepening into agitation, "and that is, when the first idea of this entered your mind."

"The night I kissed you," said Bertie, looking at her sadly.

The shot told; Lorraine was shaken from head to foot. "It is the silliest thing I ever heard in my life," she said, blushing all over, "and I think it is absolutely unkind in you to spoil everything with such nonsense."

Bertie came nearer. "I've taken you by surprise," said he. "You never thought of this, — that is evident. But the fact is clear that I want you for my wife, and that I shall never cease to try to win you for my wife. Now, think it over, and think of me kindly — for you know — you can't help knowing — that I love you."

She did not speak, and her silence encouraged him.

"Be my dear little wife, Lorraine," said he, and endeavored to take her hand.

"I will not, — you know I will not," said she. She tried to look him in the face, but he held out his arms, and looked at her so pleadingly, that she could not bear it. She felt that there was no resource but flight; she turned on the instant, and began to run through the woods. Although Bertie had to lose time in gathering up the trifles she had left behind her, — her wide-brimmed hat, parasol, and handkerchief, — the moment he started in pursuit, it was an unequal contest. Tears, born of who can tell what commingled feelings, blinded Lorraine's eyes, and she knocked against the boles of the trees, tripped against the roots, and finally fell heavily. Bertie picked her up, steadied her for a moment with his arm, — then was compelled to yield as she plunged on headlong. Everything in the wood stretched out a hand to detain her; a brier tore the flounce of her dress, and Bertie extricated it; she wound her feet in a spray of wild convolvulus, and was powerless to get loose. Twice she lost her way, and turned on her own steps, as if in a pointless labyrinth. And, through all this,

Bertie had to guide and support her, — even to speak words of cheer. No one can quite tell what is passing in the heart of a young girl, — but Bertie thought that, having raised this whirlwind, he must rule the storm. The moment, however, Lorraine heard his voice, she always darted on with new strength. At last the woods grew thinner, and separated into clumps; they could look down the level of the lawns, and see the tennis-ground.

“Lorraine,” said Bertie, “listen to me. There are people playing tennis. You had better put on your hat.”

Lorraine yielded like an unwilling slave.

“We will walk straight on, and seem to be talking, and they will not notice.”

Lorraine had to obey. Three minutes later, Mr. Redmond, who was pacing his library, was startled by the opening of the door, and, turning, saw Lorraine, dishevelled, tear-stained, flushed crimson.

“Why, my dear child,” said he, “what is the matter?”

“Oh, papa,” said she, piteously, — “oh, papa, — oh, papa!”

She came in, shut the door, and stood looking at him, her face quivering.

“But, my dear, what is it?” he said, alarmed, and putting his arm about her. She clung to him, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

“Oh, papa,” said she, after a time, “you were right and I was wrong. He *was* making love. He actually was making love all the time. Oh, I am so

ashamed. What must you think of me? I am so disappointed in Herbert Jasper."

"So disappointed?" said Mr. Redmond, finding the phrase ambiguous; but at the moment all he tried to do was to soothe her.

CHAPTER XIX.

AS THRO' THE FIELDS.

THOUGH Mrs. Reese knew, nowadays, that her husband doted upon her, that he had suffered in lacerated and apart; although he had even gone so far as to promise that she should be admitted to one of the meetings of the Shakspeare Society, she still was not absolutely happy. She sat a good deal with Mr. Reese, and esteemed it a privilege, but it was to be confessed that he had some irritating peculiarities. In moments of abandonment, he made up unpleasant faces, and he invariably rubbed up one eye while writing or reading. Even when he read aloud his notes on the play of Hamlet, he sometimes experienced a reprehensible *ennui*, and sometimes even made an excuse for leaving him before he finished. Her *beau-idéal* it may be said, had become a man more versatile, with more sense and humor, and less deadly serious. Still, all she could do at this late day was to insure for her daughter the happy destiny she had missed. She was occasionally in the humor of King Lear when she said:—

“’Tis our fast intent

To shake all cares and business from our age
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburden'd crawl towards death.”

At such moments she told Miriam that, as soon as she married to suit her, everything, — that is, almost everything, — should be made over to her.

“And you have a chance of marrying to suit me,” she added. “There is somebody I like very much.” Mrs. Reese even made opportunities for Paul to meet Miriam, and one day told him to come and spend the afternoon with her daughter, who was to be at home alone.

When Miriam heard from her mother that Paul Forbes was to come that day, she merely shrugged her shoulders indifferently, and replied that she would make a point of staying at home.

“How clever and adroit he has been!” she said to herself, at the very moment when she was flushing and trembling with joy to think that, at last, the barriers were all down and they might be happy. “How clever and adroit he has been! He has conquered everybody; step by step, he has gained all he wants. He has made everything and everybody subservient to his purpose. If I could but see into his heart for one moment, and know if he actually cares for me, or whether it is the money he wants!” She knew that she was giving herself over to the “demon,” as Paul called this mood, and that there was danger in it; she knew that sometimes her imperious jealousy was in danger of costing her what she valued most. Now she pressed her hands to her temples, and paced her room like a tigress, as she remembered how he had taught Polly Chichester’s face to brighten at his approach. Then, all at

she, she checked herself in her blind fury, stopped short, and flung up her hands.

"I don't care," she said, aloud. "He is mine, nevertheless. He shall be mine! He is all the more mine if I buy him with gold."

Just as he rang the bell that day, she came down the staircase to meet him. She was dressed in a gown he fancied, — sheer white, a bunch of cream-colored roses on her breast, and a wide garden-

"My mother and father are both away," she said to him, passing the servant, and meeting him on the threshold. "I was just going out on the lawn. Perhaps you will come with me."

Paul assented, and they crossed to the circular lawn, soft as velvet and green as emerald, around the fountain, which threw out its fine spray sparkling like diamond-dust for yards about. They walked on through the side shrubberies, and under the shade of the lofty trees, where here and there a tree stood glimmering out of the shadow and seeming to beckon or to warn. Here, out of sight of every one, Miriam put her hand on Paul's arm, and looked up into his face.

"You are perfectly beautiful this afternoon," said Paul. "What ails you?"

"I am so happy, — so deliriously happy. Mother wants me to marry you, Paul." Her eyes fell, but she could see the smile on her lips.

He uttered an exclamation.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It frightens me," said he. "What have I done to deserve such a fate?"

"Are you happy?"

"If you are, you beautiful, exquisite woman! If you are content with me, why, then, I'm out of my mind with rapture."

"That is not being happy. Now, if it were Polly Chichester you were marrying, would you not be happy of your own free will?"

Paul made a haughty gesture. She had displeased him.

"Oh, forgive me," she murmured. "All I want is that you should be happy of your own free will."

"I have no free will. Have I been able to say 'I will win Miriam or die for it'? Have I not had to wait, to watch, until it seems to me as if circumstances and other people's wills utterly control me?" But while he said this he looked at her as a lover might. "I want no free will," said he. "Make me happy, — in your way or my way, no matter, — only make me happy."

"Well, one of these days I will say: 'Mother, if you wish it, I should like to marry Mr. Forbes.'"

His face lighted up. "When? Let it be to-morrow."

"No, — by and by, in a month, in six weeks, in three months."

"Oh, you sweet, tantalizing woman. I won't wait. Don't you see, — can't you feel, that a man loses his self-respect tied hand and foot in this way. Not but that our secret has been charming. But I have

d to shuffle, to equivocate, — to hide my feelings. I long to say to the world, 'This is my wife.' I long to say to you at this moment, 'Come with me.' I want to command you, — after being under jurisdiction, I need a little spurt of omnipotence. 'Put on an old gown,' I should order you, 'leave all your mother's wealth behind you, — come out into the poor man's world, and live with a poor man. You shall have no houseful of servants, no rich dinners of varied courses, — all that you have I shall furnish, and you must be content with it.' ”

Miriam liked his rough mood.

“You shall command me, never fear. At this moment I want to kneel to you.”

Her upward glance made him dizzy. “Hush!” he said.

“I like to feel that you will no longer be poor,” she went on. “I think perpetually what my mother's money can do for you, and I try to gather from her remarks what her intentions are regarding us, — whether she will give us enough to be free to go and do as we like, or keep us with her.”

“Mark my words,” said Paul, with a half laugh, “you will never have any of her money so long as she has power to keep it. You will live with her, — she will pay your bills, and I shall earn what we have to spend.”

He was conscious of a feeling of scorn for Mrs. Leese and for her money. It was because he resented her patronage, he told himself, that he could not ardently respond to Miriam's abandon-

ment of feeling. He felt out of temper; he had obeyed and temporized so long, — so he explained his own coldness, — he could not all at once slip the leash and let himself go.

“We will not mind living here, will we?” said Miriam, shyly; — the conditions of their marriage which he had suggested had seemed to her as quite characteristically her mother’s.

“Anywhere with you,” said Paul, — and, seizing the little hand, he crushed it against his breast.

Miriam smiled, blushed, and looked around her furtively.

“Let us survey our future kingdom,” she said. She moved on a little in advance, turning now and then and smiling at him over her shoulder. She was so pretty and graceful that he took pleasure in watching her, and gradually a dull weight of stubborn pride lifted from his mind, and he gave himself up to her caprice. Her leading the way across her mother’s possessions and his following in her steps was typical of their future, and he must bear his subjugation with what grace he could. Her lack of candor with her mother, at this moment when her mother was ready for concession, made him feel that she loved plot and intrigue. But he let pleasanter thoughts chase away his pride and scruples. He admired the charming curve of her back, the supple movement of her whole figure, the pretty way in which she gathered up the lace and muslin of her gown to her left hip, disclosing embroidered petticoats and the glimpse of a black silk stocking, and

w shoes with huge buckles. Her arch laughing
ce was full of fire as she incessantly turned and
ailed while she led him on. She spoke rarely, and
en only to utter some wise practical saying about
ie crops, the young trees, the gardens. She led
im into the graperies where the vines were
lambering up the trellises, hanging like garlands,
lusters of grapes forming between the leaves. In
ne forcing-house enormous ripe bunches, showed
gainst the glass dome, looking like a painting with a
ackground of sky. They turned down a dim alley
nd found a bed of late Alpine strawberries. She
gathered some in a leaf and offered them to Paul.
He ate them slowly, offering her one occasionally,
which she declined.

"I feel like a young raven," said he, "but it is
pleasant."

"There are raspberries and blackberries," said
Miriam, pointing down a long wall. "We have
them till frost comes."

"I like berries," said Paul, smiling. Wasps flew
about; and a pilfering robin darted up, caught in the
act. The air was full of sweet and luscious scents
from peaches, pears, nectarines, and apricots. It was
a land of plenty. Now and then, they met one of
the gardeners, who saluted putting his hand to his
hat-brim, and Miriam gave a haughty little nod.

"I see myself waxing dignified and portly," said
Paul within himself. "I swell with pride already."

They came at last to a narrow lane between great
trees and hedges of mock-orange and hawthorn.

At one end opened a vista towards the north-west, all gold and crimson with the sun sinking like a ball of fire; across this illuminated background black-birds were flying about. Miriam thrilled as she looked, then sighed; she turned and smiled wistfully at Paul, her face all beauty.

"Ah, love!" said he, and put his arm around her. He drew her close. "Is it I?" he whispered, laying his cheek against her hair. "Can this man, beloved of the gods, be Paul Forbes?"

"It is not you who are happy," she answered. "It is I."

"Am I actually to share this life—to be your husband?"

She flashed a glance at him, and drew away from his embrace.

"Sweetest!" said Paul, "kiss me. I have kissed you three times, but you have never kissed me yet."

Miriam laughed, and moved farther away from him.

"Some time," she said, softly, "some time."

"Don't you love me well enough yet?"

She put her hand to her eyes, pressed them hard, and laughed again. "Not love you enough," she repeated, "Oh, Paul, Paul, Paul!"

Yet he halted; his mood was still a little reluctant; he did not claim the kiss which he knew burned on her lips for him. Had he claimed that kiss with a free and noble boldness, he might actually have come into his kingdom there and then; his shackles of pride, his half doubts, his dread of his own

motives, might have fallen from him like a dead weight; strong passion might have burst the filaments of convention which bound it, have shaken off its restraints, unloosed his tongue, and set him free. Indeed, a moment later he had resolved not to lose this precious moment, but to conquer Miriam's caprices, and begin to govern her instead of being governed. But he was too late. There came a vague sound, which gradually defined itself into the tramp of heavy hoofs; a new perfume filled the air, and they could hear long sweet breathings.

"There come the cows from pasture," said Miriam. "Aren't they beauties?"

Paul looked at the animals with a sudden animation lighting up his face. "Oh, they are beauties," said he. "Are they yours?"

"Ours. That is, — they are my mother's."

She looked up at him and marvelled at the glow of admiration he showed. She said to herself that he had told her she was beautiful with a colder gaze than he had now.

"This all makes a charming composition," he remarked. "The narrow lane between the hedges, — the view of the sunset at the end, — and those superb cattle. I should like to see that on canvas."

"I am glad nobody has the chance to put it on canvas," answered Miriam. She was jealous of this artistic impulse. He ought not at that moment to have cared. "I am sick of art and cant about art," she went on, petulantly. "Surely, you do not believe that art can really perpetuate beauty like that?"

"Don't you recognize the fact that it is art that makes the essence of man's existence imperishable?" retorted Paul. "Unless art in some development or other had garnered up man's sweet and powerful emotions, the beauty and the worth of a transitory moment, what would there be in the world here in this nineteenth century? Sometimes I believe that the underlying impulse of all art, poetry, music, literature, is a thirst for immortality, the desire to prolong endlessly the animating idea of a happy moment, the sting of a poignant sensation. Thus not only can we see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears, but we have the magical and indefinable charm of other men's impressions."

"You ask what the world would be without art," said Miriam. "Had no revelation of art descended to man in all these ages, you and I might be here together just the same, and the great-eyed Alderneys and Jerseys would be trampling the lane, and the west would be lighted up, and that thrush would be singing, and perhaps," she laughed softly, and put her hand on his sleeve an instant, "perhaps, Paul, you would be thinking more of the sweet, perishable moment and less of what it reminded you of in other men's work."

"Suppose that I were the boy driving the cows and you the maid coming to milk them, should we have the eyes to see what we do now?"

"We might have hearts to feel more than we see."

"Were you the milkmaid, you would have kissed me when I asked you. The cowboy would have

insisted on his rights, — I am sure of that. But there was to me a sort of charm in the way you hoarded that kiss of yours."

"I am glad we are just what we are," said Miriam.
"The new milk is sweet. Do you like new milk?"

"Yes, let us go drink new milk."

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE CLOCK-TOWER.

THERE had been three or four sultry, lowering days, the afternoons threatening to bring showers, the firmament now clouding, now brightening; the air getting thicker and thicker, the sky purpling, the lustrous blue dying out; sometimes a promise of immediate rain, a trail of low clouds directly overhead; a few drops even—a sullen muttering of thunder in the distance, the air settling into preternatural stillness; the leaves on the trees hanging lifeless; then a breeze, a gradual lifting and half-clearing, and a gorgeous sunset.

On one of these afternoons it had looked so much like rain that Paul Forbes—although he was aware that the Reeses had an engagement at a garden-party some miles away—felt certain they would not have set out. He called at the house but found that they had set out on the twelve-mile drive in the face of a thunder-storm, relying on the signs failing as usual. He walked about the grounds, thinking that they might return, alarmed at the blue-black storm-clouds piling up in the west and north. Although the clouds rose steadily to the zenith, they seemed for a while to avoid extinguishing the rays of the sun, and gathered above it and around it, like

a vast black canopy, their edges turning tawny and purple where the beams smote them. The effect became weird; there was something menacing in the the whole aspect of the firmament.

"Something is surely coming this time," Paul exclaimed aloud, and at this instant the sun struggled momentarily against the vapors, which it lighted into masses as of flame-lit smoke, then was submerged. The vault above was now utterly black, save for little filmy scuds, which began to move swiftly across the gloom, and hang themselves down like fringes. Paul decided to seek shelter at once, and, being near the clock-tower, turned in. He was familiar with the place; he had more than once spent an hour of late, with Miriam, in a little octagonal room overhead, which Mrs. Reese had once furnished in Japanese fashion, and made over to her daughter as a birthday present. Standing in the doorway, he looked at the trees, which had been motionless, but suddenly began first to wave and then to toss and bend. A whirlwind brought a cloud of leaves and dust, and then came a sudden flash of lightning, followed by loud thunder. The rain, thus announced by all the heralds of the sky, was not slow in following, and, as the spray reached his face, Paul decided to go upstairs. He had his foot on the steep spiral staircase when he heard a rush and a sound of laughter, and somebody said, "Why, Mr. Forbes!"

Polly Chichester had also sought refuge in the

"I am caught in the rain," she explained. "So long as the sun shone, I was sure there would be no shower. Then all at once it grew so black I was frightened and ran towards home. I thought I could reach the house by the short cut, but the rain was swifter than I."

"Are you wet?"

"A little."

"It is too open here; you must come upstairs. Miss Reese would not mind, I am sure."

"Oh, no; Miriam would not mind." But Polly looked back at the wall of rain outside, vaguely troubled and reluctant. "I ought to have known," she murmured, regretfully. "Papa asked me to make some calls for him, and I was anxious to accomplish them all. It was so foolish to attempt to go to Mrs. Norris's." She walked to the door and peered up at the sky. "I cannot get away at present," she said, with a new decision, "and we may as well go upstairs and be comfortable."

She ran up lightly, and Paul followed slowly. His thoughts naturally flew to Miriam, at this promise of a prolonged *tête-à-tête* with Polly, and, realizing that she would be likely to find meanings and suggestions, he most properly told himself that it was very vexatious. There was, nevertheless, this futile comfort to be gained from the situation — that it was wholly unforeseen, and, not having been foreseen, could hardly have been avoided. It must be added, too, that when Paul reached the little octagonal room, and met Polly's shy, soft regard, he

had a definite feeling of expectation and pleasure. He had felt tired, bored, and not a little hopeless. Polly's was one of those presences which mesmerize and heal; it was a tradition among her little brothers and sisters that her smile and touch cured. This chance encounter seemed a compensation for the lost afternoon. The little place was bright with color, being hung with Japanese papers of the most vivid colors, and covered with the most fantastic pictures; light chairs and table of rattan stood about, and on a cabinet stood a tea-service of Japanese china. Polly would not at first sit down, but stood pushing aside the bead hangings at one of the windows and watching the rain.

"You are evidently not afraid of the lightning," said Paul.

"No; not in the least."

"I hope, then, you are not afraid of me."

"Oh, dear, no," said Polly, turning towards him and smiling. "I am afraid of nothing in the world."

"I recall some situation like this, in a novel, where the lady, unlike you, Miss Chichester, was afraid of her companion; and he, in the most noble and magnanimous way, walked straight out into the pelting rain, although there was no possible refuge for miles about, simply to rid her of his presence."

"Now, I admire that chivalrous sort of behavior," said Polly. "It would be delightful to see you walk off in the rain."

"Very well, I will go instantly," said Paul, striding towards the stairs.

"Oh, Mr. Forbes, come back!" Polly cried, running after him.

At this instant came a blinding flash of lightning, answered instantaneously by a peal so near that it seemed as if the bolt must have fallen on the clock-tower. Paul had turned at Polly's call, and the two had met in the centre of the room. Only Paul could have told exactly how it happened; but when the crash ended, they were standing with their hands clasped, looking into each other's faces to be assured of safety.

"Oh, that was terrible!" faltered Polly. "The flash seemed to envelop you. *I feared you were hurt!*"

Tears gushed from her eyes — there came even a faint sob.

"One of the trees must have been struck," said Paul. "I could hear the splitting of the trunk. Sit down." He led her to a seat, and then went to the window. "Yes," he remarked, "one of those tall chestnuts; it is splintered from top to bottom." He went back to Polly. "Don't be frightened," said he; "they say lightning never strikes twice in the same place, so I hope we are safe for the present."

She looked up at him, still pale, but with a smile on her face. The kind feeling he had from the first felt for the young girl passed into an acuter phase as he felt the magic of her wide, childlike eyes. He took a seat beside her. "Hear it pour!" said he. "I like a thunder-shower — I like storms of all kinds — that is, out-of-doors. Being myself a hope-

lessly mediocre man, it relieves me to have Nature do some frenzies on my behalf."

"I used to think I loved thunder-showers. I never was frightened before. Sometimes I tremble, but it is not with fear; it is as if I were lifted up — as if I heard a voice speaking — a mighty voice." Her face showed both emotion and artlessness. "I like what it says to me."

"What does it say to you?"

"That is not easy to tell. But there are many things which carry me off a little as if on the sweep of wings. Sometimes when I am singing I feel like that. I float."

"When, for example, you sing the 'Adelaide.'"

She nodded. Paul laughed.

"That all sounds very familiar," he remarked.

"You got it out of a book."

"Indeed, I did not."

"Yes, Tourgenieff describes a man's singing — he says it reminded him of a gull hovering over the shore, poised wavering, — yet upbuoyed, greeting the incoming waves and the rising tide and the setting sun."

"That is beautiful, — I never read it, and indeed I said nothing like that. I wish I could read it."

"You never read anything, so far as I can discover," said Paul, teasingly. "You show yourself superior to books. I suppose you are afraid to read them, lest they should stifle your originality."

"That is not it at all," Polly answered, with intense seriousness. "I should love to read, but I

have no time. Just think, ever since I was eleven years old, I have kept house for papa. And when you have not a great deal of money, keeping house is not easy, unless you give your entire time to it."

"Your mother died, then, when you were eleven," said Paul, dreamily.

"Yes, — she left little Lucy only a day old."

"You must have missed your mother cruelly."

"Yes." Her whole face changed, and her eyes seemed to darken. "I miss her still, — I shall always miss her. Nobody could be kinder than papa, but I have longed so for my mother. I have had to be strong, when it would have been such a comfort to be weak and dependent. Oh, sometimes, when I see a bird gather her young under her wings, even a hen brood her chickens, I say, 'Oh, happy little birds, to feel covered up so close, — so warm; oh, little birds, I envy you.'"

Paul looked at her as she spoke; he was silent for a moment; then said, "I loved my mother passionately."

"She died when you were young?"

"When I was sixteen." He was in the mood to tell about his mother, of whom he had rarely spoken. "There were four of us," said he, — "my father, my mother, and my sister, who is eight years older than myself. She was a good deal in the world, and I saw little of her: we were never intimate. But my mother and I were the closest friends. She was always beautiful to my eyes, but when she smiled

she became so bewitchingly lovely that I grew frantic and had to kiss her hands. I worshipped her. We lived in New York ; I was never separated from her until one spring, at Easter holidays, the others all insisted that I must pay a visit to some friends in the country. I wondered why the necessity for this visit seemed to them so imperative ; but I yielded. The first night I got to the house I had a dreadful dream. It was only that I was in a strange place, looking everywhere for my mother, whom I heard calling me, but could find her nowhere. This dream made such an impression upon my mind that I could not shake off the horror of it, even by daylight. I felt that I must go home, if only for an hour, to reassure myself. I was a spoiled child, used to thinking my whims of importance ; so I started. When I reached the house, it made my heart beat to see three carriages standing before it, for it was before visiting hours. The servant who let me in wore a frightened expression. 'Is she dead?' I cried out. 'Oh, no, Master Paul,' the girl answered. 'How can you ask such a question?' I observed that the whole atmosphere was permeated by a strange smell, which I recognized,—I hardly know how,—as chloroform. While I stood, the library door opened, and there stood my father,—so changed,—so haggard,—his eyes sunken. 'How did you know?' he asked me, in a whisper. 'She wanted you to be out of the way, till all was over.' 'Is she going to die?' I asked. 'God forbid !' said he. He took my hand and led me in, and

shut the door. 'The doctors are with her now,' said he. 'They would not let me stay. There had to be an operation.' I threw myself on the sofa, my face downwards, and there I remained for what seemed to me an endless time. My father could not keep still: he groaned, he cried out, — he burst into sudden, pitiful prayers. Finally, one of the doctors came in. He said it had all been very successful,—that nothing could be better; but he enjoined the necessity for quiet. If any one saw her, he must smile,—he must be quite calm. He looked at my father with an air of authority as he said this, and my father's face gave one little twitch, then he was master of himself, and went upstairs. A little later that day I too saw my mother. If I had not seen her,—I think—I think I must have died. She got quite well, apparently, but I don't suppose my father ever had another hour of security. She died fourteen months afterwards, and he did not survive her a year."

Polly pressed both hands against her forehead. "Oh, oh, oh," she said, in a piercing tone, as if she could not bear it. There were tears in her eyes again. "Oh, I pity you so,—I do pity you so," she murmured. She could feel nothing half way, and reached out her hands and grasped one of Paul's, pressing it between them.

"I ought not to have told you," said Paul, "but I was impelled to do so. Life whirls us about, shows us our loves, ambitions, and passions under many odd aspects, which we hardly realize. But certain

memories hold their own, and, no matter how we change, they never change."

He got up, went to the window, and looked out. The rain was still descending in torrents. At this moment, the clock above them in the tower sounded five.

"I have been here just an hour," remarked Polly. "It struck four while I was running here for shelter." She too went to the window and looked out. "I should like to go home," she said coaxingly, as if addressing some weather-deity. "I want very much to go home. But how am I to go in such a steady pour as this?"

"Don't be impatient. You cannot go yet."

Polly was, nevertheless, a little restless. She picked up a book,—saw Miss Reese's name in it, and was reminded of her friend.

"Miriam would be amused to see us here," she remarked.

Paul had his own views on that subject, perhaps, but he answered, "Oh, yes; very much amused."

"They took papa with them, you know. He did not want to go, but Miriam said that a family party was oppressive. None of them wanted to go."

"Except Mrs. Reese, who was curious to know if the house of those railway magnates surpassed her own."

"It could not surpass it, could it?"

"Mrs. Reese's house has cost a great deal of money."

"It is so full of beautiful things. It is so delight-

ful to me to go about the rooms, and study the pictures, the sculptures, and the china. In every way it has been a liberal education for me to know Miriam."

" 'A liberal education.' You are strong in quotations."

"Miriam has done a great deal for me," said Polly. "She has actually governed me for years, — that is, she has governed me so far as my manners, my tastes and instincts are concerned. She taught me to ride, — to drive, — she gave me singing-lessons herself until I was ready to have a master. She furnished my room, she taught me how to dress and what to wear. Had papa not disliked any suspicion of patronage, she would have done still more. But she never hurt our pride. In spite of the difference in the way we live, I have never had the least feeling about her knowing all the economies and necessities of our *ménage*. There was never any one like Miriam,"

Polly went on, with ardor. "She is like the sea, — the deep sea, — sad, mysterious, but beautiful and full of treasures rich and rare. And she is like the stars, too, — far-off, pure, and inaccessible. I am, I confess, at times, a little afraid of her, — but I love her, — I love her so dearly that I long, — I long always to do something for her, — for some occasion which would let me suffer for her, — if need be, die for her."

The girl's passionate enthusiasm touched Paul, who recognized in it the vague but sincere feeling of early youth.

"She seems to be very fond of you," he observed,

finding it a difficult matter to talk freely of Miriam. He was always conscious, when he spoke of her, of constraint, had to struggle for the right phrase, which when he chose it seemed too much or too little, and sounded commonplace and insincere. Having made one confidence already to Polly, he had an idea of telling more about himself, of disclosing how he stood with this friend of hers, whom she praised so generously. But Miriam had said over and over that she wanted no one admitted to their secret. It was, nevertheless, in his opinion, the moment for a frank confession.

Polly suddenly clapped her hands. She had been moving about the room, handling the objects, and looking at the pictures of fantastic women, swaddled in strange draperies, their hairs full of pins, and with fans in their hands. "I have an idea, — an enchanting idea. We will have afternoon tea ourselves. I wonder I had not thought of it before. Here is a caddy full of tea, and what do you suppose is in this chest, — cakes, Mr. Forbes, cakes! Did you ever hear of anything so delightful? Here is the kettle, and if it were only filled with water," she added, looking at Paul with the expression of a wheedling child.

"I have only to hold it out the window," said he.

But that plan was too simple to suit Polly, who argued its demerits. Evidently what she wanted was to have him go downstairs and fill it at the door. She so evidently wished him to leave her that he obeyed, — even lingered a little over filling the ket-

tle. When he came back he found that her enchanting idea had included a most comical device. It had come into her head that it might brighten a dull moment to put on a Japanese dress, which Miriam had once dressed her in, and which she found hanging up. She was transformed into a Japanese lady, in a long sweeping garment of purple and gold:—her hair bristled with enormous pins, and she was flirting a fan. No transformation could make Polly less than charming, but he stared at her in amazement.

“Upon my word,” said he, “this is a new sensation.”

“I look as if I came out of a bric-à-brac shop, do I not? I wish there was a glass in which I could see myself. Miriam brought this and another over here one day, and we put them on, and drank Japanese tea. Now you shall have some.”

“Is there another dress?” asked Paul, quite in the humor of the thing. “I feel so crude, so western. I want some Japanese clothes.” He rummaged about while Polly put the kettle over the lamp, wiped the plates and tea-cups and set out the cakes. He found draperies which he disposed as he liked best;—he made himself a cap out of a mat, and put on some straw slippers. They were equally diverted with each other’s costume, they needed no audience. They made profound salaams; chose attitudes out of the pictures; posed, laughed, derided each other. The kettle began to hiss and to steam, Polly made tea, and they drank innumerable cups of it. Outside,

the rain had slackened, ceased for a time, then begun again; but they had forgotten the weather. The imperative whim of getting the full worth of the moment governed them both. It was indispensable to Polly that she should tell all the droll things that had ever happened: it was a new experience to be so listened to, laughed at, scolded, and sympathized with. Paul allowed himself to be swayed by the same impulse. It was an hour of enchantment. The genii had brought the prince and princess together; and the pulse of life, curiosity, happiness, beat at its fullest,—that is, for Polly: Paul was diverted; the girl was beautiful as an angel: ardently alive with fire and feeling, and instinct with artistic ideas. He wondered each moment what she would say or do next, and she went on surprising and delighting him. But he was not carried away; he had a bad conscience,—a dim presentiment of evil; in fact, he had begun to tell himself that this nonsense must end, when, all at once, the clock struck six.

“Six o’clock,” murmured Polly, aghast. She seemed to awake. “What have I been thinking of?” she said, looking around her. She ran to the window in haste. The rain still fell, but the clouds were breaking and a patch of blue sky showed between the trees. When she looked back at Paul she saw that he had pulled off his toggery and put it out of sight. Her face changed, the masquerade was over and all its charm had flatly vanished even to the imagination. Her attire, up to this moment coquettish and piquant, had suddenly grown hideous.

to her. She felt as a fading court beauty does at a ball when the daylight reveals her paint and powder.

"How absurd it all was!" said Paul. He smiled at Polly, but there was a curious soberness about his eyes. "Have you a good power of forgetting things?" he asked, coming up to her. "I have. I advise you to forget all about our afternoon tea,—never to think of it again,—tell nobody, and let nobody know that it ever happened."

She looked at him timidly.

"Was it so very, very wrong?" she asked. "Oh, do forgive me."

"It was not in the least wrong," said Paul. "But,—in short, I would never tell anybody. We have just played like two children. It was all very natural for you,—but, at my age, I ought to be ashamed. So keep my secret. Now I will go. I will send one of the boys for you. You will have put things in order, and you will be ready when he comes."

The two looked at each other, and Polly dropped her eyes. Paul walked downstairs, and out into the rain, without looking back. The hint about tidying the place was not lost upon Polly. She was unsophisticated and she was truthful; but at this moment she had the instinct to hide, to cover up her traces. Twenty minutes later, Tom found her standing in the doorway of the pavilion, awaiting him. When she reached home, she looked anxiously to see if her father had come in. It was a relief to find the study empty.

CHAPTER XXI.

POLLY'S TROUBLES.

IN fact, it was an exciting life that Polly led nowadays. Even if nothing actually happened, a feeling that something momentous and delightful was about to happen had grown very strong in her. When she was busy in the morning, making the house neat, planning for the day, buying and giving orders, her activities were spurred by the feeling that she must be through and ready for the event whose intangible promise was in the universal air. Sometimes she examined herself as to the reason for this perpetual expectation; for if she heard a sound, — no matter how insignificant or how far off, no matter how pressing her occupation at the moment, — she must at any risk stop and find out what was going on. But, although so eagerly alive to all that occurred, she was yet given to dangerous dreaming fits: a thought would cross her mind, and her hands would drop; she would stand smiling, rapt, — forgetful of all around her. And what stirred this deep, blissful reverie? Why, a whiff from the sprig of heliotrope in the vase, which, faded though it was, she would not throw away, because it reminded her of yesterday's happy time. One Sunday morning in

church, she heard her father give out his text; then, before she remembered to begin to listen to his discourse, he was raising his priestly hand for the benediction. All that day Polly shuddered to remember the dreadful hiatus which, without any moral or religious sense, she had filled up with pondering; pondering what deep subject? Why, it was this: the night before, a group of people had been talking about gems—telling what gem belonged to each month of the year—and she had said, “I wish I knew what precious stone my birth-month signified.” And Mr. Forbes had said, “Why, of course, pearl,—no, no, opal; that is your gem, Miss Chichester.”

Now, what did he mean? It required all sermon-time for Polly to study out his meaning, and, indeed, at the end she was still far from satisfied.

There was, to tell the truth, a terrible amount of thinking to be done in these days. It was at least a comfort that there was the whole night to think through; for Polly seemed no longer to require the sound, solid sleep she had once found indispensable. Let her fall asleep, quite worn out, the moment her head touched the pillow; just as soon as she was a little rested, some idea would knock imperiously at the door of her mind, and she would become wide-awake. Then the temptation would be irresistible to rise and look at the church-spire, which tapered into the far-off sky, or peer into the shadows and study the spectral points of light which emerged here and there from the gloom, until the birds began to twitter. Then, with all the birds abroad, all

Nature jubilant with voices and radiant with beauty, how was Polly to go to sleep again?

Mrs. Reese had arranged an expedition for the fourth day after the adventure in the clock-tower. Paul Forbes had expressed his desire to see an historic house a few miles away, and the great lady had seized this opportunity for a picnic. The necessary arrangements consumed much time and attention, and the discussions which went on in the intervening days were a boon to Polly, who, unless some lively subject was in progress, could hardly have kept a certain secret from Miriam. Some of the party were to ride; others would drive. Mr. Trowbridge Archibald was among those who were to go on horseback; and Polly, when asked how she would go, accepted a seat in Mrs. Reese's carriage, with her father. She gave no reason for this caprice, which Miriam called an absurd whim, and kept her course against every sort of argument and entreaty. She knew that she was vexing Miriam, but the alternative of pleasing Mr. Archibald by accompanying him on horseback made her strong.

Taking a ten-mile drive with Mrs. Reese was an arrangement likely to dispel foolish illusions, and Miriam left Polly to her fate. The great lady set forth on her picnic with a magnificent mien. She had been ordering her household about all the morning, and was conscious of having directed her operations like a general. Her ideas had been extravagant in theory, and minute in detail; easy to conceive, but entailing difficulties in the accomplishment. The

miracle of the loaves and fishes had constantly to be reversed, and twelve basketfuls to be packed into the place of two small loaves. Having triumphantly achieved all she was ambitious for, she took her seat in her carriage, ready and eager to conquer fresh worlds.

"You do not mind sitting with your back to the horses, Polly," she said, as she stopped at the rectory to take up her party. "Suppose you take this place opposite me. Dr. Chichester, where will you sit?"

"By my daughter; and Mr. Reese shall sit by you," returned the accommodating rector.

"Are you sure you do not mind riding backwards?" queried Mr. Reese.

"I mind nothing. By a special act of mercy I am never sea-sick, — have no headaches; I am not so thin that my elbows cut into other people, nor so fat that I cannot bear pressing. I have no corns, and anybody may tread on my feet with impunity."

"You are very fortunate — very fortunate, indeed," said Mrs. Reese. "Now, my poor husband is the most unlucky of men — gets a headache and nausea at every motion and every glare; nothing agrees with his digestion; he rarely sleeps. In fact, I never saw anybody so painfully peculiar as Mr. Reese."

Mr. Reese smiled in a feeble and conciliatory sort of way, as he took the post of honor. "I feel ashamed of myself," he murmured; "but, Miss Polly, if you will not mind humoring an old man—"

"Come, come," said Dr. Chichester, "don't call yourself names. Sit there and be comfortable.

Polly and I are delighted to be where we are. It is a great thing for us to have a holiday on such a fine breezy morning as this, and a prospect of cakes and tarts by and by."

"Cakes and tarts!" repeated the great lady, with a toss of her head. "I have spared no expense. You will have a magnificent lunch. I flatter myself I know how to provide. There are cold meats, salads, *pâtés*, and there will be hot croquettes. Creams and ices, of course,—I have stinted in nothing. You will find not even a glass of good wine forgotten."

"Ah," said Dr. Chichester, "I am afraid your ministrations are not good for my soul."

"You are to have claret-cup the moment we get there. Oh,—Andrew, Andrew, stop the coachman. Get down and ask Mr. Forbes if the hamper of claret was sent on,—if he is absolutely certain it will be there in time."

They paused and waited for the cavalcade to approach, and Polly could gain a glimpse of her lost opportunity. There was Miriam in her gray dress, in her hat with gray plumes, on her black horse, across whose glossy coat the sunlight played out in a beautiful satiny sheen; there was Lorraine, in dark blue, on her white mare, and Bertie Jasper beside her; Trowbridge Archibald, looking distant and bored, with Madeline Redmond;—above all, there was Mr. Forbes, descending, and coming to the side of the carriage, touching his hat, with a swift smile at Polly.

For a while after this, everything is hazy and blurred to the girl's perceptions. Mrs. Reese plumes herself, like a bird of rich plumage, as she is; patronizes the Chichesters; finds fault with her husband for the way he sits, — for looking dismal, then for smiling vacuously; for being quiet, and not contributing a word to the general entertainment, then for telling worn-out stories and uttering commonplaces. The cavalcade passes, then is passed in its turn; there are bows, and waves of the hand — there are kisses thrown. Polly is neither dull nor unhappy. She has a nest of pleasant thoughts, does not care for the great lady's fault-finding, and prefers to be a little quiet, and outside of the gay times the other young people are having. She watches the horses and their riders when she can, and finds it a pretty sight to see them enter the shadows and re-emerge into the sunlight. Mrs. Reese has, presently, another idea: Andrew is called again; Mr. Forbes's presence is demanded, — he dismounts, and comes to the carriage, and Polly has another glance and smile from him, and misses nothing — nothing in the world.

"On my word, Mrs. Reese," said Dr. Chichester, when they were again in motion, "I don't see how you are ever to get on without Mr. Forbes. He seems to fill a niche, and an important niche."

"I don't intend to get on without him," said the great lady, with a rising crest. "Mr. Forbes is like my own son already."

"Your own son!" repeated the rector, finding a

ominous idea in her words. "Why, yes,—how kind I have been! Why, certainly; I see it all. Bless me! — Polly, why did you not tell me?"

He turned to his daughter, and met her smiling, credulous look.

"You didn't know yourself, eh?" said he, and laughed deep and long. "May I congratulate Miss Miriam?" he asked.

The great lady shook her head.

"No, indeed," she said. "I merely threw out a hint. No, indeed. Not a word. You are our ergyman. It seems quite natural to say something to you. Here we are."

They had reached their destination, which was a deserted colonial house, dating back almost to Penn's time. It had been thrown open for the party, and Mrs. Reese took possession and led the way through the sunny, silent rooms. Polly followed, keeping close to her father, whose full, cheery voice sounded perpetually and seemed to protect the girl, and give her an opportunity to get over this curious trembling, which half frightened her. She felt a horror lest somebody who knew her well should address her. They might think, — but no, nobody would think — nobody could believe such a horror. But Polly wished that she could be all alone somewhere, and find out what it all meant, — what was true, and what was false. It was a little past twelve, and they were to lunch at one or half-past, spend the afternoon, and not be at home till towards six. How was it to be borne? But while all this terror

and dismay, — all these hurrying images of shame and dread were chasing themselves through her mind, she turned her smiling face right and left, as people spoke ; answered, if she were addressed, and watched the great lady order everybody about. She had summoned Paul Forbes and consulted him, ordered him, scolded him by turns. Peter, the butler, was there, it is true ; but Peter's duties were accurately defined to his own mind, and, if he fulfilled those, the heavens might fall and he was not moved out of his way. But to Paul Forbes's possibilities of making himself useful there could scarcely be a limit. The sight was too suggestive for Polly ; — it meant everything which she needed to remember, but the nail was already driven in, and scarcely needed to be used as a form of torture. Some of the party were sitting down in the porch, others took chairs under the tulip trees on the lawn ; the tinkle of glasses was heard.

"They are going to have claret-cup," said Lorraine Redmond, coming up to Polly ; "let us walk down the path together ; I do not want any claret-cup, — do you ?"

Polly was far from wanting any claret-cup ; and the two girls, with linked hands, took a neglected path towards the old garden and orchards, between clumps of currant and gooseberry bushes, overrun in places by luxuriant hop-vines, which had escaped from their poles. The old garden was a wilderness of honeysuckle, sweetbrier, elder, and tall white and purple phloxes, which had thriven untended and survived

the weaker plants. A turn in the path opened a vista through a row of pollarded willows, and disclosed a brook and an old spring-house.

"I feel as if I had not seen you at all of late, Polly," said Lorraine. "I was busy until I had got through my examinations, and since then I have squandered, — simply squandered my time."

"Yes," said Polly, listlessly. "I have seen you, and yet I have not seen you. There have been a great many people everywhere."

"Yes; too many people, — don't you think so?" said Lorraine, with a toss of her head. "I know that you find Mr. Archibald too many, and that was the reason you came with Mrs. Reese. I am so glad you do not like him."

"Mr. Archibald? Oh, don't speak of him, Lorraine."

"Did it make you happy to come with Mrs. Reese?"

"Mrs. Reese cannot make me miserable. She ordered us all about, scolded us, snubbed us, — but that was no matter."

"Mr. Forbes is getting very tired of her," said Lorraine, shrewdly. "He sees what she wants, and —"

Polly's heart gave a great leap.

"Oh, you think she wants him to marry Miriam!"

"Oh, yes; but Mr. Forbes will never marry Miriam," said Lorraine, with conviction. "He simply could not stand Mrs. Reese. He may have thought, at first, he might bear it, to make a rich marriage

like that, when she was so taken with him, but I see it in his eyes sometimes nowadays, — that he wants to escape.”

A moment before Polly had felt as if she must cry, she was so troubled, so dismayed, and her heart ached so cruelly. But that was all over now; it was evident that Lorraine saw clearly, and that what she said was sensible and true. The *other thing* — what her father and Mrs. Reese had intimated — had seemed unreal all the time. She had not only suffered at the idea of such a tormenting situation, but she had been frightened at it; she felt now as if she had regained equipoise after some curious physical sensation. She was happy again and could have laughed at the absurdity of Mrs. Reese's illusion. Was not the great lady always making mistakes? was she not perpetually the dupe of her own vanity? And what could be more impossible than that Miriam should have felt an interest in Mr. Forbes, and have been playing a part, — pretending indifference.

Although Polly had ceased to listen, Lorraine was still voluble in discourse, and was arguing on the subject of the futility and foolishness of love and marriage, or, more particularly, the talk about love and marriage which went on in the world.

“It would be so much better,” she remarked, with emphasis, “if a woman were to hear no allusion to such subjects. She needs to give her mind to better things, — to the really important facts which influence her career. For although she may regard

such things as utterly trivial, it is disturbing to the peace of her soul to think that something important seems to hang upon her decision. The *ego* in her stirs in its sleep, awakes, and, having heard of what is going on, feels eager and anxious to play its part in this foolish, spoiled world." Polly turned her brilliant, weary glance with wonder upon Lorraine. What was it she was talking about?

"Don't you think, Polly," asked Lorraine, conscious that these remarks had been ineffective, "don't you think it is a pity girls should hear anything about marrying? Don't you think we are perfectly happy without lovers or husbands?"

"Nobody ever asked me to marry him," said Polly, laughing, but with a little tremor in her voice. "And I don't think it would be exactly pleasant when it happened. But yet, although I do not think about marrying, I take it for granted it will all come some time. If I knew it would not," Polly paused, and her voice wavered, "why, then everything would be quite different. No matter how tiresome or difficult anything is now, one has only to think that by and by, when real life actually begins, everything will be enchantingly blissful."

"Enchantingly blissful! That sounds vague, and rather foolish."

"But then, that is because you are so lofty, — so serene. Of course you will never fall in love, but do you never feel that it makes a difference who is near you? Do not some people make you dull, lifeless, and rather cross, while when somebody else

approaches the simplest circumstance seems a reason for pure joy. It is so even among dear friends, — among girls like us, — and of course when the best friend of all comes, he would make life enchantingly blissful."

"I am sure there is nobody, nobody in the world, I would rather be walking with here than with you, Polly," cried Lorraine. "Now, I am sure you will say the same."

"Yes, indeed," and the two girls embraced fervently.

"Let us promise each other we will never marry," said Lorraine, with intense seriousness.

"Oh, but it would be wrong to promise that. I am sure one ought not to bind one's self. It might be a duty to marry."

"I am not sure that marriage is a duty under any circumstances," Lorraine said, gravely. "Perhaps if it were a widower, with young children, — and a woman were domestically inclined," — she looked wistfully at Polly. "Now, suppose," she said, softly, "suppose a man were to ask me to marry him, don't you think it ought to be enough for me to tell him that I have much better things to do than marrying him."

"A widower, with young children, do you mean?" asked Polly, quite puzzled at Lorraine's evident struggle.

"Of course not a widower," said Lorraine, indignantly. "The idea!"

"But you said a widower!"

"Nonsense! I asked you if a man ought not to feel that he was asking too much if he wished me to spoil my career for him."

"The idea of any man's daring to ask you, Lorraine! I assure you he would be a very brave man who did venture. Anybody common or mediocre would be shrivelled up by your scorn of little men and little minds."

Lorraine's delicate face was pink. "I cannot imagine your marrying anybody," Polly pursued, "because you have never had just the same thoughts and the same ideas that most girls have. You are not dependent, and nobody has ever been dependent upon you. You have not lived close to others, — you have been engrossed in your own studies and your own ambitions."

"You mean that I am selfish!"

"Oh, no, I don't mean that. What I do mean is that you have not found out the worth of the common side of things. Sometimes, do you know, that knowledge seems to me of more value than any other knowledge to a woman. Now you asked if a man would not be presumptuous to want you to spoil your career for him. What is your career likely to be? Do you fancy you will ever, — even if you become a college professor, — achieve work which some man could not perform as well, or even better? Now, suppose you had a home of your own, — a little household world which you knew down to its minutest details, and which you could make the foundation of a beautiful, happy life. A woman

needs order, regularity, courage, and a clear comprehension of everything, from the smallest to the greatest, in order to have a house really pleasant. She has to be ready to meet emergencies,—and, to do this, she must have a serene soul; she must take up everybody's unfinished work, smooth it out and finish it. Now, if you were to tell a man he was spoiling your career, he might say, 'Well, I offer you another in its place, twice as hard, and, to my thinking, infinitely more important.'

"As if that were a real career!" exclaimed Lorraine. "And doing it all for one man's comfort!"

"Of course you would have to love him, and then you would find that it is very satisfying to live with people one loves, because one can always be doing something for them, making them more happy, at least more comfortable, giving them delicious things to eat, if one can do no more."

"You have no ideal,—actually no ideal," cried Lorraine, indignantly. "I don't think you are a safe guide. One should not try to make a man comfortable and happy in that way."

"In what way?" said a voice behind them. The two girls had wandered through the orchard, and along the brookside, under the pollarded willows, to the old spring-house, where the good housewives of former generations had cooled their cream and kept their butter sweet. "In what way?" Herbert Jasper asked again, for he had come up, and was waiting for them to turn. "Let a man be happy and comfortable almost any way."

He looked at Lorraine; but she avoided his glance, with such a startled look of being caught in the act that even he felt for her. "I think you two girls are awfully selfish," he went on, turning his back on Lorraine, and addressing Polly. "Here I got a holiday in order to have a pleasant picnic,—and in all my life I never knew anything so dull as I have found it for the last half-hour or more. I wanted to come before, but did not venture to intrude."

Polly had regarded Lorraine with amazement; she understood the secret instantly, and was so startled by this sudden enlightenment that she was hardly able to check an exclamation. She smiled at Bertie, half with sympathy, and half with malice.

"Mrs. Reese sent me for you," he continued, blushing a little. "There's going to be some sort of a spread. Come, Miss Lorraine."

As he turned and looked at her, she rallied her powers, gave an angelic but a mocking smile, and began walking rapidly up the orchard towards the garden, holding up her habit with both hands. The others followed, in almost complete silence. Polly was trying to adjust these new impressions she had gained about Herbert Jasper and Lorraine, to her preconceived notions of each. She seemed all at once to penetrate their souls, and see the real nature of both. She looked at Lorraine with fresh perceptions, and before Bertie she felt an awe which she could not have defined. How easy and how natural it had all been,—and yet how strange it was. She had a sensation of fulness about her heart, and could

not speak. Bertie needed no effort of hers to amuse him. He was watching the pretty little figure which flitted on before him.

Luncheon was already in progress when they reached the house, and Dr. Chichester had retained a place for Polly between himself and Dr. Jasper. They kept up an incessant conversation across her, and Polly felt separated from all the rest. She could see Miriam down the table, with flushed and sparkling face, — and Paul Forbes was beside her. Polly felt worn out; thought was suspended; she was no longer even curious about what was going on. What she felt was a singular humility and timidity: like a forward child who has been corrected for trying to attract attention, and is trying to atone by effacing itself. As soon as the meal was over, all rose, as with an intention of doing an appointed thing, and moved out-of-doors, and across the lawn. Polly took her father's arm, and moved on by his side, asking no questions. No one — not even Mr. Archibald — came up to her: everything was dream-like and unreal; — she understood and cared for nothing. They crossed the lawns to a meadow, skirted that, and entered a little wood, and, passing through its shadows, emerged on a large green paddock. On both sides of this were bright yellow stubble-fields, in one of which the wheat still lay in long swaths, where it had been tossed by the reaper. The air was impregnated with a rich, pleasant odor; the wide sky was exquisitely blue; there was an occasional cry from a bird; all the party

alked incessantly, and seemed in the highest spirits ; something interesting was to happen at once, and was being watched for. This was what Polly saw, heard, and felt : all else was vagueness.

Somebody led two horses into the field, and a man, one of Mrs. Reese's grooms, was following with two saddles, — one of which was a side-saddle, — it was Miriam's — Polly knew it by the housings. The animals looked full of spirit, even a little antic ; and it was said by somebody that it was a foolhardy thing to try them, since they were only half broken in. Edward Jasper was directing operations : he had the smallest, a bright roan mare, saddled and bridled ; he mounted her, rode her about, jumped two low bars into the next lot, vanished out of sight, then returned, flung himself down, and was evidently telling Miriam Reese that the creature was safe. The saddles were changed, and Miriam was lifted to the seat. She sent the mare straight at the bars, and almost everybody ran to the fence to watch her. Polly did not move. Her father was telling something to Mr. Reese, and she was glad to remain quiet ; all effort seemed a pain at that moment. She heard shouts, applause ; then the far-off sound of hoofs grew nearer, and Miriam galloped back, — jumped the bars, and drew rein while all the people gathered about her. She looked superb : her hair had fallen over her shoulders ; her eyes were lighted up ; a wonderful rose-tint set off her olive face. She evidently wanted another trial of the mare, and kept her seat. She motioned towards the other horse, and

he was led forward, — a rough, colt-like creature. A discussion evidently went on as to whether it were worth while to risk mounting him. Paul Forbes took hold of the bridle, patted the beast, talked to him, stroking his nose, and led him about. Then, with his hand still stroking the mane, he vaulted up, and without a saddle contrived to keep his seat while he rode the horse round and round the paddock. Sure of his temper, Paul next wanted to try him under the saddle, and found him satisfactory enough. Enamoured of the rôle in taming so fierce-looking a creature, the rider put him through a variety of paces, and finally offered him the bars. Finding that he jumped two without effort, he tried three; — then, possessed by the devil of sheer ambition, had a fourth put on. The last bar was near putting an end to both rider and steed, for as the animal took the leap his hoof struck the top rail; — frightened, he crashed through it viciously, and fell backwards; Forbes was thrown, and the animal to all appearances rolled over him.

Every one had rushed towards the spot. Somebody had shrieked; could it be Polly? for it was she who was in advance of all the others, and who was pulling Paul Forbes away from the plunging horse, and helping him to rise.

Paul himself forgot everybody save Polly. He was not hurt, except for a bruise or two; — he managed to get on his legs without difficulty, and stood holding the girl's hand.

He did not speak, only looked at her until the

group came up and made him remember. "What an awful fool I was!" said he; then, dropping the hand he held, and turning to the others, "I hope the horse is all right."

"I hope *you* are all right," said Dr. Jasper, taking possession of Forbes with a professional air.

"Oh, I am all right. Look after the horse. It will break my heart if I injured him."

The turf was soft, and rolled a little; the tumble had been an easy one.

Paul kept looking at Polly, and now went up to her.

"His hoof almost struck your face," said he, in a sharp tone. "My God, I can't get over it." He shuddered, and passed his hand over his eyes. He had not yet remembered Miriam. He only saw Polly, with a face like marble, and dilated eyes. His exclamations were scarcely heard, for every one was talking at once, telling his or her sensations, and describing exactly how the accident happened, and how it ought to have been averted.

It was at this moment that the actual catastrophe of the day occurred. Mrs. Reese had been sitting at a distance, rubbing her eye-glasses, and had not actually seen her hero thrown. When she realized what had happened, she was naturally eager to rush to his assistance, but, by a miserable fatality, she was entangled among the group of ladies; Nora Redmond's camp-chair was planted on her dress, and somebody's button had caught the fringe of her mantle. Thus impeded, the great lady did all she could:

she shrieked, she struggled, she commanded "Fredderick" to come;—finally free to make her way forward, she unluckily tripped in the rug spread out on the turf, and fell. She did not come off so bravely as had Paul Forbes and the horse. She had in fact sprained her ankle.

"A serious sprain!" said Dr. Jasper, "a very serious sprain! You must not think of bearing your own weight for six weeks."

The great lady had been raised to a seat, where she was supported by a bevy of ladies. Her shoe and stocking had been cut off, and the rapidly swelling ankle was being bandaged with handkerchiefs. "Not for six weeks," reiterated Dr. Jasper.

"Good heavens!" said Mrs. Reese, speaking for the first time, for she had experienced a stupor of surprise at the idea of her being overtaken by so imperative an accident. "Good heavens! who will carry me about?"

"Mr. Reese, of course," suggested Dr. Chichester. "Of course it will be your husband's duty and pleasure to carry you about."

"Good heavens!" faltered Mr. Reese, quite overcome. "Good heavens, Belinda!"

"Did you hear, Miriam," said Mrs. Reese to her daughter, who had quietly dismounted by herself, and now approached with a white, rigid face, "I have sprained my ankle,—a really serious sprain? The Doctor says your father will have to carry me about for six weeks. Oh, Mr. Forbes," she continued, as Paul came up, "I was running to your

assistance when this frightful accident happened. I have sprained my ankle, — a really serious sprain, — and the doctor says Mr. Reese will have to carry me about for six weeks."

"Don't, Belinda," murmured Mr. Reese, fretfully. "The idea is preposterous. I couldn't carry you about to save my life. I'm not up to your weight. Perhaps Mr. Forbes —" and Mr. Reese made a feeble but hopeful gesture towards the family ally, who replied, with alacrity, while everybody smothered a laugh.

"I am not certain of my powers, but I am quite at Mrs. Reese's orders if she will trust herself to me."

"Oh, I did not mean — of course I did not mean that you were to — in short, that — that —" quavered Mr. Reese, aghast at the impression his words had made. "All that I intended to say was that you might have something to suggest."

"We will contrive means of transport for her," said the Doctor, who was in high feather over the idea of such a patient. He had taken in all the resources of the situation, and intended to make the most of them. He had written two prescriptions; he was laying down a cushion under the wounded foot, and was authoritatively setting forth a comprehensive system of his future treatment.

"You don't suppose Mrs. Reese is likely to obey those strict orders, Doctor" said Dr. Chichester.

"She had better obey me," said the Doctor, grimly. "A sprained ankle can be a bad thing for a heavy person like her."

"A heavy person!" retorted Mrs. Reese. "Nothing of the sort! I'm as light as a feather. Of course I intend to be careful, but —"

"You'll repent it if you are not careful, that's all I can say," declared Dr. Jasper. "I've got one patient who does as she likes, and is likely to die as she likes. She has a passion for lemon pudding, and half a dozen times I've been called to see her when she was in the last agonies of cramp and colic from having eaten lemon pudding. 'The remedy is in your own hands,' I said to her the other day; 'you will have to give up eating lemon pudding.' 'Surely,' said she, 'you don't suppose I'm going to humor my stomach in that way.'"

"I think she's extremely sensible," said Mrs. Reese. Dr. Jasper uttered a groan, and went to see about a carriage for his patient.

"I consider her idea excellent good sense," said Madeline Redmond. "The only trouble is that all the time she allows herself to be afraid of lemon pudding. A dyspeptic must say, 'It does not, — it shall not, — hurt me.' Remove the belief that you are dyspeptic, and there is no dyspepsia."

"But then it is so difficult," said Nora Redmond; "it is a very difficult matter not to believe in dyspepsia when it is wringing your soul with misery."

"It may be absurd until you have dismissed petty fears from your mind. You must forget what is personal, and merge yourself into the universal thought," declared Madeline. "Now, at this present moment, Mrs. Reese has been made to believe

that if she moves her ankle she will have a frightful pain, and inflammation will set in. No doubt if, fearing this result, she should move it, she would think that she felt a pain. What she needs to do is to dismiss all belief that she has sprained her ankle, fear nothing, and use it precisely as if nothing had happened."

This lively conversation in the midst of the group had had a distracting, impertinent value of its own to Miriam. She could keep silence, command her own emotions, and refrain from committing herself. She stood by Mrs. Reese, and her slender white hand, covered with rings, seemed to caress her mother's shoulder and arm. The great lady remembered always afterwards that Miriam showed strong feeling, and could not speak for emotion after this accident. When the low phaeton came, she broke silence, and gave directions how Mrs. Reese should be moved to the seat. She took the place beside her mother, and, at the great lady's entreaty, Paul Forbes mounted into the rumble.

Polly Chichester had stood a little apart, just in the path of the phaeton. Once she had stolen up to Miriam, then had fallen back with the impression that Miriam had repelled her advance with an ironic, insolent glance. As the phaeton passed, the eyes of the two met. The expression of Polly's struck Miriam: the girl's golden hair was blown about; there was something diaphanous — almost ethereal — in her beauty.

Miriam looked back at her with a bitter gaze. There was a flash like that of a weapon in her glance.

CHAPTER XXII.

MIRIAM AND POLLY.

POLLY remembered the pain of Miriam's ruthless glance all that night; and the more she remembered it, the more the thought of Miriam's displeasure hurt her to the very soul. She felt convicted of something,—something false and dishonorable,—but what? What had she done? She had simply been happy — too happy; life had offered her one delightful surprise after another. Although she was ready to repent, and to repent bitterly, she knew not how to repent, for she was not sure what she had done that ought to be repented of. What was it Miriam wanted of her? No matter what it might be, she was glad enough to do it; — to give up, to renounce, — to confess, — to atone, — anything rather than bear this nameless accusation, this hint of perfidy. If it were all about Mr. Forbes, Polly felt, with a childish wrath and indignation, that she wished she need never see him again.

The day after the picnic, Polly went to see Miriam, was admitted at the door, and, as her habit had long been, she found her way up stairs. Miriam's room was empty, except for the maid, who was laying out a new dress on the bed, to be tried on.

The girl went to find her mistress, and, coming back, said that Miss Chichester was to wait. Polly stood in the centre of the room, and looked round her. She knew the place very well, and the rich and exquisite appurtenances had helped to kindle the worshipping admiration she had always felt for Miriam. She had grown up believing in Miriam's supremacy, her unlimited fastidiousness, and perfection of taste. Nothing had ever quite satisfied her; and Polly had, in a way, grown to believe that nothing existed which could quite satisfy her. The pretty, idle, fictitious existence Miriam led had seemed an end in itself; it must hinder and stifle the direct, spontaneous hopes and fears which move ordinary mortals. Polly looked at the little lace-canopied bed, — surely, nobody could toss sleepless there all night, or kneel by its side confessing sins with sobs and anguish. There was the long glass where Miriam dressed. Polly had seen her standing before it, regarding her image listlessly, and directing her maid to do this or that; and had wondered that she could care so little for the beautiful gowns and trinkets, and furbelows. "How little I have known about her thoughts, wishes, and feelings!" Polly said within herself, and at this moment she realized that Miriam had felt cruel pangs, — had longed and waited, and sometimes in vain. The idea that Miriam could suffer stupefied her, and to remember that she had perhaps helped to make her suffer seemed something absolutely beyond her power of atonement.

While she stood there, with these thoughts in her mind, Miriam came in. She entered swiftly, with the air of one who has a distinct purpose. She wore a white, gauzy peignoir covered with lace, which swept the floor, heightening the elegance of her figure, and making her appear singularly tall. She came straight towards Polly.

"Sit down," she said, "sit there. I wish to stand."

Polly obeyed her: indeed, she was glad to sit, for she was trembling. It was evident that Miriam was at the mercy of a reckless temper, and was ready to yield to it.

"I hear that you asked for me," she said, looking down at the young girl, who gazed back appalled.

"I want — I want to know why you are so angry with me, Miriam," she faltered.

"I wonder at you, I wonder at you, Polly," said Miriam. "I used to be fond of you, — to believe in you, — I used to think you were my little friend. Now, with all sorts of things on your heart and conscience, you dare to ask why I am angry with you."

A tumult of thoughts impeded Polly's utterance; all sorts of terrible accusations seemed to cry "shame!" in a wild uproar, but she could fasten on no separate voice. She looked up, her eyes wide-open, and waited.

"Do not pretend," said Miriam, with a look and a tone which stung, "do not pretend that you do not know what I mean."

"Tell me, — I beg you to tell me, Miriam," whis-

ered Polly, her very lips white; "I try to think, but you frighten me, — I can think of nothing."

"What, — have you forgotten how you ran to Mr. Forbes yesterday, shrieking — putting yourself before all the rest — pretending to save him from danger, — leaning over him, — looking into his face with an agonized expression, — holding his hand, — not letting go! — Do women, — nice women, — do such things?"

Polly tried to speak, but could find no voice.

"You can deny nothing," insisted Miriam.

"The horse was plunging violently," murmured Polly, — "he might have done terrible mischief unless Mr. Forbes were dragged away."

"Are you Mr. Forbes's sister, — his engaged wife?"

"No," said Polly. She felt a chill like death over her.

"You have done all you could to attract Mr. Forbes," said Miriam. "You have talked to him, sung to him; you have met him at every turn. Do you not seek him out everywhere? Smile at him, listen to his words as if enchanted! Have you not treated Mr. Archibald so that he will no longer approach you? Have you not made it plain to every one that you desire only Mr. Forbes's attentions? And when you saw, yesterday, that he was safe, did you not stand as if in a dream, and when he turned to you, did you not smile at him? Smile? — smile is no word. It was as if you surrendered your whole heart and soul to him."

Polly had first shrunk back pale and cowering, —

then had crouched, laid her head on her knees, wrapping her face in the folds of her dress. She was utterly devoured by shame;—a shame which ate into every memory and every hope. It was as if all familiar ground had been cut from beneath her feet,—and she knew not on what she stood. She believed everything that Miriam had said to her, and she remembered things which Miriam did not know, and which were perhaps still more inexcusable.

“I am waiting to hear what you have to say for yourself,” said Miriam, impatiently. “You cannot but confess that you are in love with Mr. Forbes.”

Polly raised her head, and disclosed her agitated face.

“Miriam, oh, Miriam!” she faltered.

Miriam leaned down, put her hands under the tender curves of the lovely, youthful face.

“You are in love with him,” she said. “Deny it, if you can.”

“And if I am, — how can I help it?” said Polly. A sort of petulance, of self-assertion, began to declare itself against this prolonged torture. “I meant no harm—and—and—and—he was not married nor engaged.” She raised her sincere, limpid eyes to Miriam, ready to plead her own cause. What she saw on the other’s face suddenly enlightened her. “It is so, then!” she cried, smitten to the very heart, “you are going to marry him!”

Miriam’s face showed impatient scorn. “Who told you that?” she asked, continuing to gaze at Polly, who could not sustain her look.

"You mother said, yesterday, he was like her own son."

Miriam was silent.

"Oh, Miriam," Polly went on, "Miriam, forgive me! It seems to me my heart is broken; that I have been going on this way against my best friend." A stinging sense of her own treachery assailed her, as all sorts of recollections rushed over her in a flood. Yes, indeed, she had been shameless, wicked, ungrateful. She started up and flung her arms round Miriam, crying out for forgiveness, telling her over and over again that she had meant no harm.

Miriam pushed her away angrily. "He has made love to you," she said, in a strange, hard voice.

Polly tried to think if this were true, but her mind could lay hold of nothing definite. She turned from the idea of Paul Forbes with horror and contrition, feeling that everything between them had been monstrous and wrong. Miriam watched her, her conviction of Paul's dishonorable conduct deepening every moment.

"He has made love to you," she persisted. "Tell me everything he has said to you."

"I will tell you everything I remember," said Polly, between the sobs which now burst forth. "But he has said so much,—he has told me so many things, I cannot remember them all. He has been kind,—but I do not think he has made love to me." She looked up with streaming eyes, but she found no pity in Miriam's face. "I will tell you

everything,—everything,” she went on. “I ought to have told you at once; I wanted to tell you, but Mr. Forbes bade me forget it all, and never think of it again,—so I knew that he thought it was wrong, and that it must not be spoken of. Now I see it all; it was treacherous—it was base, not to tell you.”

Miriam had turned as if to go away, but now she stood perfectly erect, looking at Polly over her shoulder.

“What was it?” she asked, coldly. “What was it Mr. Forbes told you to forget?”

“It happened the day of the shower,—the day you were all away. The storm threatened, and I was running home through your grounds, when, all at once, the rain came like a deluge, and, as I was close by the clock-tower, I went in.” She paused a moment, and looked wistfully at Miriam. “Mr. Forbes was there,” she added, dropping her voice. “We went upstairs to the Japanese room.”

“And stayed there till the shower was over—it rained five hours,” said Miriam. “We could not venture to come back till nine o’clock.”

“Only two hours,” declared Polly. “It was striking four as I went in, and when it was six Mr. Forbes went away and sent Tom for me.”

“And Mr. Forbes made love to you those two hours!”

Polly fell on her knees beside Miriam, and clung to her dress, hiding her head in the folds.

“I don’t know,” she murmured, in a faint voice.

"I don't know whether he made love to me or not; there was one moment, —"

She broke off in embarrassment, dismayed at the coarseness and cruelty of this strange confession. It was so hard to have to strip off the shell of this embryo romance, and let in the garish light to the tender, beautiful little winged thing, growing in darkness and mystery. "Oh, I can't tell," she said, hopelessly; "I don't know how to tell!"

"You must tell," said Miriam, in a hard, dry voice, that sounded like a stranger's in Polly's frightened ears.

She made a convulsive effort. "There came a flash — a blinding flash! — and the thunder was terrible. It seemed to surround him, and I was so frightened! —" she broke off.

"Go on!" said Miriam.

"*We were standing, holding each other's hands,*" said Polly; and at this she threw herself prone on the floor, and felt as if she could never raise her head again.

There was a long silence, while Polly hid her face. It grew, after a time, more appalling even than the voice of her conscience, and she ventured to lift her head and look about her. At first she did not see Miriam; then, her dumb, frightened eyes glancing about, discovered her upon a couch at the end of the room, where she had thrown herself, and looked, at this distance, like a mere crumple of lace.

"What happened then?" asked Miriam. "Get up from the floor. What happened then?"

Polly rose. She went nearer the lounge, and stood still. She no longer trembled, — her tears and sobs had ceased, — a clear resolution burned in her eyes.

"We sat down and we talked," she said, eagerly. "It went on raining, and I could not get away — I really could not. But yet I wanted to go; — I did not realize quite how wrong it all was, but I was not quite easy about it. Mr. Forbes told me about himself, — about his mother and father. And then — there is something else," she suddenly broke down again, "the worst of all."

"Go on."

Polly took up her narrative in a broken, disjointed way — struggling with confusion.

"I found the Japanese dresses — those you and I wore one day, — and while he was gone downstairs, I put one on. Then I made tea; and we drank it, and laughed and talked, — and it seemed to me," — Polly's whole soul was bursting through the sobs, "it seemed to me that — it — was — perfectly — delightful."

She said no more, but continued to stand, her head bowed, like a culprit awaiting sentence.

"And was that all?" Miriam asked.

"Yes — that was all."

Miriam slowly rose.

"I want you to listen to me, Miriam," said Polly, going closer to her; "if I have seemed to do you wrong, I do not ask you to forgive me, — not yet. But I want to tell you that I will never look at Mr. Forbes again — never speak to him again. — If I

could — I would go away, — but there would be a difficulty about that. Still, I will tell you what I will do, — I will marry Mr. Archibald if he asks me. I will do that willingly.”

Miriam gave her an ironic glance.

“Your resource is inexhaustible,—inexhaustible,” said she. She took a step or two, then stopped and glanced back at Polly. “Say nothing of this,” she said. “This is between you and me. Speak of it to no one, — do you hear? to no one. Go away now, — some time we will talk it out. I have not yet made up my mind.”

Having said so much, she left the room, and Polly remained standing, gazing at the door by which she had vanished. After a while, she remembered that Miriam had told her to go, and she found her way out, passing through the corridors, and descending the stairs, as if in a dream. It seemed strange to catch a glimpse of Peter, in his pantry, dressing an *épergne* with fruit and flowers. The man came out as he saw her, and opened the door for her, saying, “A fine day, miss,” to fill up the pause.

Perhaps even this contact with a human being helped to shake off Polly’s terror and distrust; for by the time she was outside the grounds, all her decision of mind had returned. A heaviness weighed upon her heart, but she was no longer bewildered. She felt keenly that it was she, and she alone, who must suffer, and that she deserved it for trying to rob her best friend. The moment she was in the house, she went straight to her father. He had

questioned her of late about Mr. Archibald's attentions, and she wanted to tell him that she "liked Mr. Archibald extremely, and would be very happy, — oh yes, — in fact that if the young man wanted —"

"Oh, nonsense! go away," said Dr. Chichester, as he heard this confused declaration. "I shall not sell you as cheap as that, my little girl."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MIND-CURE.

THE sprained ankle was a considerable resource to Mrs. Reese, and for two days infused a valuable amount of sensation and excitement into her life. She sent for a rolling-chair, and was wheeled about the house, from one end to the other. She tried crutches, and hobbled, — in fact, any kind of locomotion which could be suggested was a successful expedient for passing the time. She would not allow her husband or her daughter to be out of her sight, and claimed Paul Forbes's constant attentions as her rightful prerogative. She sat for these two days, almost smiling with content and ease of mind, among the clouds of incense wafted towards her by her whole household. She had been ordered tonics and a nutritious diet, and, at the end of forty-eight hours, excessive stimulation and alimentation had their natural results, and the great lady's temper began to show itself. By the end of the third day, every known form of entertainment had palled upon her. Even Paul Forbes spent himself in vain: he could no longer amuse her. She declared that they were all tired of her, — that they displayed their indifference too openly, — that they wished her out of the

way. She was not so much exacting with her family as she was paralyzing; she imposed no tasks, but apparently sought to make effort, even existence, impossible. Having brought everybody within her reach to desperation, the great lady bethought her how she might take a wider range,—for she longed somehow to eclipse the gayety of nations. Certainly, nobody could expect that the mistress of resources like her own was to be put to the wretched expedient of bearing a sprained ankle with patience. She was savage with the Doctor, and made up her mind to dismiss him and send for some surgeon in town. At the very moment when she was bent on compassing something effective, even if it entailed human sacrifice, Miss Madeline Redmond threw herself into the breach, and effected a mind-cure. Great occasions demand great remedies. Madeline concentrated her mind, and the miracle was achieved.

“In fact,” said Paul Forbes, “it was a new Lourdes. Mrs. Reese threw down her crutches, cushions, chairs,—she walked,—she almost danced.”

It was actually a great cure. Dr. Jasper had promised the great lady six weeks of prolonged torture, and here she was going about on the fifth day after the accident, as well as ever. Mrs. Reese was glad that she had not dismissed the Doctor; she no longer bore him any grudge, and was glad to have the opportunity to make him realize his own professional incompetence.

“You see me,” she said to every one who came near

her. "It is just five days since I sprained my ankle, and the Doctor gave me six weeks to recover from it. Six weeks! and now, in five days, I walk without a limp. I turned my foot tripping over the rug at the picnic; it gave me excruciating pain. I almost fainted, — I had to be supported, — the pain was excruciating, ex-cru-ci-a-ting. Luckily, Dr. Jasper was there, with restoratives in his pocket: he drenched me with camphor, held salts to my nose, everybody's handkerchief was torn up to make a bandage, for my shoe and stocking had been cut off; the ankle was, I assure you, swollen enormously, and the Doctor said, — now, Doctor, you can endorse all I am saying, — and the Doctor said it was the worst sort of a sprain — that it would take me three months to recover from it entirely, and that for six weeks I must not bear my own weight, but have Mr. Reese carry me around. Did you not say so, Doctor?"

"Oh, I dare say," said the Doctor. "I confess I supposed you were badly hurt, and a sprain must not be neglected."

"I was terribly hurt; it was the very worst kind of a sprain, — you said so yourself, Doctor; that I was to keep my foot on a cushion for six weeks. I suffered agonies, — agonies for four days, — then Made-line Redmond said, 'Do try the mind-cure, Mrs. Reese,' and, simply not to refuse any means of help, I consented to try it. So she gave her mind to the case, and she wanted me to give mine. I was so worn out that it was hard for me to concentrate my thoughts, but I sat perfectly quiet for two hours.

How my brain did work! Then she said, 'I think you will find no difficulty in walking, Mrs. Reese.' And, although I could hardly believe it, I actually walked across the room, simply resting my hand on Mr. Forbes's arm."

Naturally, Mrs. Reese's requirements had so dominated the whole household that Miriam had had little leisure to see Paul Forbes alone; and she had postponed all resolutions and all actions until her perceptions should be less complex and confused. He had been very considerate of her; he had shown no weariness and no annoyance at Mrs. Reese's caprices and tempers. Let Miriam study his face as she might, she saw no signs of discontent or disinclination; in fact, there was a patience and a strength about him, under trial, which tormented her; a resolute intention made itself felt in his tones of voice,—in the dignity with which he spoke, sat, or acted.

"He imposes this patience upon himself," Miriam said, within herself. "He must hate everything here; no man alive is more susceptible to what is dejecting,—more fastidious about what people say and do. If I, who have been used to my mother all my life, find her tempers and inconsistencies unbearable, what must a cold, critical stranger think of her? It is just a part he is playing."

But whenever Miriam spoke or looked at Paul in these days, her manner was so humble, so soft, so full almost of supplication, that she touched his heart. The night after the great mind-cure had

been effected, he said to her as he took his leave, "We will begin to be happy again now."

He knew not quite how to interpret her look in return, and he felt a singular dejection as he went out and found himself under the stars. He could not satisfy himself about his relation to Miriam, and hers to him, when she sometimes met his warmest expressions of love with coldness and reserve, and humiliated him at the very moment when, if she really studied the subtle traits of the heart, she would make him feel that they had one common impulse. He did not at this moment flatter himself that things were going well with him. He felt a little worn out, and disposed to question things, and say, "Is this my life?" He met Herbert Jasper in the street, and they strolled about together.

"I was just thinking," Paul remarked, "that it was extremely odd that I came to Sycamore Hill, and, above all, that I at once became mixed up with half a dozen people of whom I should never have heard except for you."

"It was not altogether a bad thing for you, was it? Suppose you could go back to last May, and, knowing all that was about to happen, have it in your power either to come here with me, or stay away,—what should you do?"

"At this moment," said Paul, "I feel as if I should hesitate. For the past few days I have felt singularly out of spirits."

"I don't blame you for that, knowing what has

been going on," said Bertie. "Father has had his own trials with Mrs. Reese."

"I did not care about her tantrums," said Paul. "Upon my word, I feel grateful to her, in a way, and it is morally bracing, to have her take something out of me. What I feel is something different. However, every man is at times haunted by his own ghost."

"What sort of a ghost do you see?"

"My own ghost — my real self; not the man who has been here. I feel as if I had been a sort of brilliant adventurer, and as if the *élan* had vanished. I long to sit down with myself again, and talk over what has been going on."

"When a man is in love," Bertie remarked, oracularly, "he has odd, incomprehensible moods. It is really singular how it changes a fellow to be in love."

Paul was impressed by the tone and manner of his companion.

"You are in love," said he. "Well, it has occasionally crossed my mind that you were in love, but I sometimes fancied it might be a flirtation. Of course it's that little witch?"

"Of course it's that little witch."

"Is the thing settled?"

"Well, no; not quite. She says she won't have me."

"I see you do not take her word for it."

"Of course I don't. There's no arguing about the matter — no more arguing about it than there is

about hunger and thirst. I couldn't stand it, you know, if she really held out."

"Oh, she will have you," said Paul, cheerfully. "You always get everything you want. I wish you joy; I always admired her—she is like a flower made up of fire and dew."

"Thanks," said Bertie. "Well, here you are. Good-night." Paul turned into his own rooms. He thought over his friend's love-affair with some amusement, and wanted to tell the news to some one. Curious to relate, it was not to Miriam that he wished to disclose the secret, but to Polly Chichester. Polly, more than Miriam, saw the humorous side of things, and had an impersonal and irresponsible sense of the fantastic development of the human drama. Miriam was not so readily amused, and her comments were apt to be touched with scorn. But after Paul's first surprise had faded away, he thought over Bertie's love-affair to find out its real meaning, and its logical value in determining character. Bertie's confession had been individual and characteristic, but at the same time it was typical. Love with the typical man is a strong instinct, which must be satisfied. Paul both admired and envied his friend for falling in love in such a way that his heart, and not his intellect, dictated his course. He found his belief in the reality of his own feelings towards Miriam, and Miriam's towards himself, becoming paler and paler, mistier and mistier, till what he called his engagement seemed to rest on nothing tangible or actual. His sceptre

as Mrs. Reese's son-in-law melted into thin air, and his crown as Miriam's husband dissolved like a glittering bubble. In this mood he went to bed, trying to be philosophical. "I feel the branch break under me," he said, like Victor Hugo's bird, "*mais j'ai des ailes.*"

But he had a surpassingly sweet dream — a dream which carried his mind away from his rather troublesome love-affair, to an ideal world, where his hopes of life obtained a new reality. He could not tell whom he loved; but he loved, and was loved in return. Fugitive and transient as this phase of emotion was, it governed his consciousness next morning when he awoke. He decided to tell it to Miriam. It gave him an insight into the love he must demand; a love he had always missed; a love which was like the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

Nevertheless, on his way to Mrs. Reese's he turned into the rectory gate for a moment's speech with Polly; for he wanted to see the laughter come into her lovely eyes at his news. He had felt sure of seeing her at the door or window as he passed through the grounds, for she often glanced out at him in that way; but there was no trace of her. Instead, he met Miriam Reese as he was passing on.

Her expression was cold, and the recognition was not a joyful one. "Are you going in?" she asked.

"No; if I saw Miss Chichester at the door, I was going to tell her something. I often catch a glimpse of her as I go by."

Miriam looked at him with a stern folding of the lips. He gazed back at her, smiling, and wondered if she had grown thin: her eyes seemed set closer together than usual, but they were intensely bright. "You are not well," said he. "You have had a hard time of late. Let us do something after I have paid my visit to your mother."

"You will find me in the clock-tower," said Miriam.

"In the clock-tower?"

"Yes."

She nodded, and went on to the house, while Paul took his way to Mrs. Repse. She had a great deal to say, and it was past noon before he could make his way to the place where he was to find Miriam. He remembered the day of the shower as he entered the pavilion; in fact, he had checked himself in an impulse to say to Miriam that he would rather meet her anywhere else than in the clock-tower.

He went up the staircase slowly. Miriam was sitting waiting for him, her hands crossed, and leaning forward. She looked as if she were holding herself well under restraint, but yet showed that she was all tense, alert, ready to spring. The moment Paul approached her, she stood up and began to pace to and fro.

"I kept you waiting for a long time," said Paul, "but your mother —"

"I was in no haste to see you," Miriam said, interrupting.

He went up to her, and gently took her hand.

"I have offended you again," said he; "God knows I have no idea what my offence is." They regarded each other silently. "You do not love me in the least at this moment," he went on, and put a hand on each of her shoulders, looking down at her sweetly and seriously. "I have got to begin all over again." He paused a moment. "Or is it," he resumed, "that you are tired of loving me? Have you found me out? Have you discovered that I am neither so clever nor so wise nor so presentable a fellow as you first took me to be? I always told you that I did not deserve you; and now that you see the truth of my words, you cast me off like a glove which does not fit you."

His look and his tone tried her self-command; she dropped her eyes under his glance, and her lips quivered.

"What is my offence?" he asked again.

"There can be but one offence between two people who pretend to love each other."

"You mean unfaithfulness. Am I unfaithful?"

"I am ready," cried Miriam, raising her eyes with a dangerous flash in them, "I am ready to give you everything. You are a poor man, and you shall have all the money you wish; you do not begin to realize how rich my mother is. You shall have leisure, security, every earthly means to insure happiness. As for me, I reserve nothing for myself — I am ready to serve you on my knees if you will. A woman like me may be weak, — she may be foolish; but when she has once given her heart, she gives it utterly. As I

say, I am ready to give you everything, and I ask but one thing in return."

"That is, — my love?"

"That is — your life, — your whole life."

Paul put his hand to his forehead.

"You should not have taunted me with my poverty," said he, in a low voice. "It is true enough, but —"

"I did not mean to taunt you with your poverty; I only wished to make the case clear. Just now you accused me of fickleness, — of being tired of loving you, and all the time it is you who are fickle, — I will not say false, but you do not find my love enough for you, and you set about winning the hearts of other girls by every means in your power."

They no longer stood together, but separated and apart. He did not answer, but looked at her calmly.

"When I say the hearts of other girls, — I mean possibly only one, — I saw how you looked into Polly's eyes the day you were thrown."

Paul laughed; — he began to measure the force of the storm about to break, and determined to avert it if he could without facing it.

"My dear Miriam," said he, "I know that you love to be a little jealous, and that poor little Polly seems a safe target. I looked in her eyes, did I? What I thought of was, 'Suppose that bright young face had been spoiled by the horse's hoofs!' It cut me like a knife to think of the horrible possibility. Come, now; be as angry with me as you choose. I am your property, — if you will have so poor a thing, —

play with me at your will: scorn me, rage at me, lash me with words, with thongs if it pleases you, — for if you only love me I can bear it all. But just leave Miss Chichester out of the question: it hurts me to have you make such allusions, — it humiliates us both. I cannot quite understand the rapid revolutions of your mind, — one day all tenderness, all sincerity, — and the next, like this.”

“You consider me violent and unreasonable,” said Miriam, flushed with wrath, yet on the verge of tears.

“At all events, I consider you emotional; I wish you had not such a perilous temperament. Poor creature although I am, you must reconcile yourself to my faults and limitations.”

She came up to Paul, and in her turn put her hands on his shoulders, and gazed searchingly into his face.

“You seem to answer me,” she said, “and yet you evade me. You only give me the husk — I cannot get at the core. But while I am with you, you almost utterly satisfy me and make me love you so that I become blind to the fact that when we are separated your course is just what most tries and vexes me.”

“How often am I away from you? Come, now! I should say that of late we had seen each other perpetually!”

“Do you happen to remember being in this very place last week?”

Paul gave her a half amused glance. “The day of

the shower? Yes, Miss Chichester and I spent two hours here."

"Do you think that pleases me?"

"Frankly, I see no reason why it should displease you."

"Did you not hold her hands?"

Miriam flushed crimson as she asked this, and averted her face; but something impelled her to drive home an accusation which should rankle in Paul's deepest consciousness. He uttered an exclamation, then put up his hands and unclasped her from his shoulders, and walked to the other side of the little octagonal room and sat down. Miriam, whose eyes followed his movements, could not at the moment penetrate his mood and be certain what thoughts were in his mind. She saw that he was displeased, — whether by her knowledge of his private feelings and actions, or simply from distaste of the subject, she could not be certain. Partly to justify herself, she went on, —

"I saw that Polly was in love with you. I taxed her with it, and she confessed, — she confessed everything —"

Paul sprang to his feet.

"For Heaven's sake, Miriam," said he, fiercely, "stop. You shall not go on. Don't you see, — you can't understand that what you have just said is abominable?"

He gave her a look which was far from tender. "Are you a woman without taste, without ideal?" he asked.

"Oh, forgive me!" murmured Miriam, "but I suffer,—you cannot think how I suffer. For me there is but one thing,—and that is your love,—your absolute love,—and you give me no certainty of it. And when with my own eyes I see, and when I hear—" she broke off, warned by his gesture that she was touching on perilous ground, and began to sob violently. He came towards her, put his arms about her, and led her to a seat. He was sorry for her, and would have tried to soothe her if he could; but something stifled him. He too was shaken with emotion; yet he could not have told what moved him so deeply. He knelt before her, and half clasped her in his arms.

"Let us end this," said he, at last. "If you love me, trust me. If you cannot trust me, you do not love me, and I will go away at once."

She laid her cheek against his. "Heaven hangs on my believing you," said she. "I want to trust you,—but I have seen it growing all the time."

"Seen what, dear?"

"She loves you," gasped Miriam.

Paul frowned, released her, started to his feet, and walked away again. "I always gave you credit for some fastidiousness, Miriam," said he. "Since you choose to revolt my taste and my tenderness for you, go on. Your mind is full of suspicions and evil constructions, and it may be better to let the whole ugly brood see the light."

"It is not a mere suspicion. Polly herself confessed,"—

Paul brought his hand down with a crash on the window casement. "I beg pardon," said he, "but I cannot listen to it. Confessions! Good God, as if there were anything to confess! That girl brought to confession by you? It is like pulling a flower to pieces. Your inquisitiveness carries you to strange lengths, Miriam."

She sat gazing at him as if fascinated. If she could but read his heart, — she said within herself, — if she could but penetrate the secret of his reserve. He understood the meaning of her glance.

"You would tear me to pieces if you could, to pluck out the mystery of me," said he. "But it would be hardly worth while; it would escape your grasp. That experiment has been tried over and over again, unsuccessfully. You will have to take something for granted."

He saw that she bit her lip, — then her eyes dropped, and tears fell from them. He went back to her.

"What can I do, — what can I say?" he demanded. "I do not want merely to propitiate you, — I want you to see the folly of your ways. Do you think me utterly destitute of pride? Can't you understand that I say to myself, 'If I were a rich man — if I were her equal in position she would not venture to treat me so capriciously.'"

"As for that," said Miriam, "there was Lord Wedderbourne, who was beyond me in position, yet I would not marry him until I had tested him."


"He was weighed, then, in the balance, — weighed and found wanting?"

"Yes." Their eyes met, and Paul laughed.

"Test me, — put me in the crucible. Give me an ordeal by fire. Oh, sweetest," he said gently, "you don't know what love is, — you don't realize that it is something always making, always growing, out of kindness, sympathy, little tendernesses, mutual hopes, graceful intimacies. At first sight, I found a powerful charm in you; — a charm which deepened and fixed itself, because you were kind. You have been very generous to me — I had no future, and you gave me a sweet, sudden hope of a happy future — I was lonely, and you brought me a delightful and stimulating companionship. A man must have been poor, and must have been lonely, in order to realize what I felt for you. Generous as you have been, if I am ungenerous, if I am unfaithful, — then I am a cur, — a base cur."

"You are not that, — still, you might like the idea of marrying me, and yet have your strongest feelings moved by somebody else."

"I see," said Paul, "your idea of love is taken out of books." He felt stubborn and cold; what he needed at this moment was not eloquence, but strong, passionate feeling and an invincible tenderness which would carry him away and master her; but he was still more than a trifle angry. "Wait a little," said he, with decision. "Let us dismiss this subject now. I find myself saying meaningless things; you too are a little run away with. You pretend to love me, yet



ou all the time wound me, — I feel sore, and hurt, and bruised all over. Let us try to be calm.”

“Very well,” said Miriam, coldly; she did not raise her eyes.

He waited a moment, then leaned down, and said, “Miriam!” She slowly raised her eyes to his. He kissed her.

“How foolish it all is,” he whispered.

“I know, — I know,” she answered. She drew her head down to her, and pressed her cheek to his.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“MAIS, J’AI DES AILES.”

MY DEAR PAUL:—I want you to meet me to-day at a quarter before twelve at the bridge on Cresheim Creek,—you know the place. You will find Miss Chichester, the children, and myself, and we are going to walk down the glen to Devil’s Pool, and picnic there. My mother will not expect you.

Yours ever,

MIRIAM REESE.

This note was delivered to Forbes the next morning, at ten o’clock, and inspired no faint feeling of curiosity in his mind. He had awakened early and in a mood full of presentiments. Let him try as he might to seize a clear and firm intuition of the duty of the present moment, he could gain no mastery over his own will. “She should not have told me about torturing that child for the gratification of her horrible inquisitiveness,” he said, within himself, and experienced anew the pain of that first trying moment of grief and wrath. It had had a deep influence upon him; it had released him from the imprisonment of paltry motives, and given sway to hitherto unsuspected powers in his own nature. Miriam had fallen below his ideal of her. He had

thought that he perfectly comprehended her character: he knew her love of perfection, and had supposed her thirst for something absolutely sweet and satisfying in the way of love was a part of her struggle to obtain a possession without a flaw. "It is that accursed money," Paul thought within himself. "She believes that she can buy me, heart and soul; and I hardly wonder, for I have made one ignoble concession after another." He had eaten an early breakfast, and sat down to his work at the catalogue. His exasperation with the whole tangle of circumstances fed his energies, and by ten o'clock he could take a clear satisfaction in the definite results accomplished. He was just about to set out, as usual, for Mrs. Reese's, when the billet from Miriam was put into his hand. It puzzled him to account for the strange freak of bringing him and Miss Chichester together. But, after all, it was quite in accord with Miriam's nature to vibrate from one extreme to the other. Yesterday it had pleased her to be jealous, and to-day she had an interval of magnanimity; she was by turns just and cruel, reasonable and capricious, sympathetic and scoffing; at one time, led by a word; at another, difficult and rebellious. "For myself, I could bear it," he thought; "but poor little Polly!"

He felt at the present moment dead to the enchantment of any woman alive; he decided on a course of conduct for the day so negative, so colorless that Miriam could find no fault with it. Then on the morrow he would end this miserable drifting amid uncer-

tainties. Either he would be engaged to Miriam before all the world, or he would be a free man. Everything had suddenly acquired a new meaning for him.

He had returned to his work after he had read and answered Miriam's despatch, and when he remembered to look at his watch again it was half-past eleven. It was late, and he got himself into his blue flannels as speedily as possible, and set off for the rendezvous. He thought it not impossible that Miriam might pass him in the carriage, and offer him a seat; but he saw no signs of her. "I am engaged to her," said he to himself, "but nobody must suspect it. Nobody disapproves, but she cannot bring herself to confess to the world that I am her choice. And it is all because she is rich, and I am poor, that I have no will,—I am selling my soul for that accursed money." He struck across the fields to the woods in this irritated mood. Once in the shadow, with the silence and coolness of the thicket about him, he grew more reasonable. He reflected that he was asking a great deal from fortune when he counted on everything being satisfactory. So far in his life, nothing had been wholly satisfactory,—since he was a child at least, he had never been quite happy, yet, just as if he were used to have exactly what he wanted in the world, he was irritated and depressed, ready to resign all his advantages in the world, simply because he had to bear a woman's whims. Certainly, he might as well possess his soul in patience, suffer and submit, and bide his

time; that was part of the bargain; as Miriam said, for what she had to offer him he must give his life, — his life. "She feels that she pays a high figure for a husband," he said to himself; "and she does. I don't think I am worth it. At least, I have no right 'to keep back a jot or tittle of myself. By Jupiter, I wish she would lock me up and keep the key herself."

This sort of excited soliloquy, interspersed with expletives, and emphasized with stamps of his heel and clenches of his fist, was not conducive to a clear idea of his bearings. He had tried to take a short cut, but had gone considerably out of his way. In fact, when he finally reached the trysting-place, it was twenty minutes past twelve o'clock.

There was nobody on the bridge, and he thought at first the party had gone out without him; then he heard a shout, and saw Miss Chichester and four of the children on the banks of the stream, a little above him. Miriam was not there.

"Excuse me for being so late," Paul said, hurrying up the opposite bank. "Has Miss Reese gone back for me?"

Polly was sitting on a stone, and had not moved as he approached. He observed that at first her lip trembled slightly, and that her eyes wandered nervously away from his glance, but then she regained her self-command.

"She told me she had first to pay a visit, but was sure to be here at a quarter before twelve. She must have been detained."

Paul stood measuring the stream between them, and wondering whether to cross or to stay where he was. He had an instinct that there was systematic design in Miriam's tardiness.

"It is a relief to be certain that I have not been keeping you," he remarked. "I tried a short cut and got lost, — I assure you, I was quite out of my path."

Polly regarded him soberly.

"At least, our consciences are void of offence," he remarked, lightly, then bit his lip, when he saw a glow of something not unlike indignation come over her face. He felt that he had brought everything to her mind which she needed to forget. What jugglery of Miriam's was this, in order to throw them together! She must have planned it with a purpose, and would presently swoop down upon them, like a destroying angel, and accuse them of all sorts of offences. Churlish though it might seem, he would keep on his own side of the brook. An engaged man, — that is, a man bound as he was, — has to give up something, and, by all means, let it be the graces and decencies of society. An expedient for passing the time until Miriam should choose to appear was to make a sketch; accordingly, he fumbled in his pocket, and brought out a block and a pencil.

"This is a very good point of view," he said. "Suppose I make a sketch of you and the children."

"By all means," answered Polly, with a new and a grand manner, which became her. "But first, I must give them each a sandwich, for they are ready

to cry with hunger. Will that interfere with your drawing?"

"Not in the least. I will make a Charlotte of you."

"A Charlotte?"

"Yes, a Charlotte."

"I don't know what you mean."

Something about her sudden, wistful glance melted Paul.

"No, you never know what I mean; at least, when I talk out of books," he said, with an indulgent tone, and meeting her eyes with a glimmer of a smile in his, while he looked about for a place to sit down. "So far as you are concerned, poets and seers might as well never have suffered, never sung."

"I know I am shockingly ignorant," Polly returned; "but, after all, one does not like to be called an ignoramus to one's face."

"And you sha'n't call her an ignoramus to her face," struck in little Robert. "Polly knows everything,—she teaches me sums!"

"Oh, yes; anything simple and concrete she is easily mistress of," said Paul, teasingly, and glancing again at Polly. "Her two and two always make four,—I am sure of that."

"I hope so," said Polly. "It is not only true, but it is safest to insist that two and two make four."

"Much the safest. But beware lest your two and two, which make four for yourself, come to five for other people."

Her eyes suddenly dilated; she grew pale.

"I do not know what you mean," she murmured, uneasily; "I—"

She broke off with an air of distress, and turned away, as if she had suddenly remembered Miriam, and was looking for her.

Paul himself did not know what he meant by his own words, which had been a mere trick of speech. If he could have decided what was best, he would have exercised his will in his behavior to Polly. But, after all, why not act sensibly and naturally? Stiff silence, and intense consciousness of the embarrassment of the present situation, would be more awkward to account for to Miriam than friendly relations. And what he was coerced by was the necessity of having, presently, to account for everything he said, looked, did, — almost thought.

"Never mind," said he, "never mind. I doubt if Juliet, Perdita, even Miranda, could have passed a Harvard examination like Miss Lorraine Redmond."

He was busy with his pencil, making a line here, a touch there, putting in the arch of the bridge for a background, while Polly stood in the foreground filling the eager little mouths. The babble of the stream, and the voices of the boys blended harmoniously; and, as usual, when he was doing anything, he felt a sort of joy in the occupation, and filled out the drawing with fine, clear touches.

"Very like Charlotte, indeed!" he said, presently, holding out the sketch, and looking at it through a lunette made with his finger and thumb.

"But who was Charlotte?" demanded Polly, who had almost entirely yielded to a feeling of calm and pleasantness. "What did Charlotte do?"

"She went on cutting bread and butter," said Paul.

"I think you might try to help me a little," she murmured. "I should like to know things. It enlarges one's ideas to read," she observed, profoundly. "Now, I only know what I have lived. It must make one strangely and wonderfully experienced, to be acquainted with the lives of all the people who ever existed."

"It does," said Paul. "It makes a man profoundly experienced. He can always remember some poor devil, out of a book, who has been in a similar dilemma to his own."

Polly's eyes sparkled. "I should like that; for, of course, one can always profit by the example."

"On the contrary! Every man has to flounder out of his misery in his own way. He merely has the gratification of knowing that his blunders are void of originality." Paul pulled out his watch. "Why does not Miss Reese come?" said he. "It is almost one o'clock." He grew anxious, as certain possibilities rose in his mind. "Something must have happened," he went on, hastily; "I will go back at once and find out."

He thrust his sketch-book into his pocket, and started up the bank. At this moment the sound of a horse's iron tramp on the bridge drew their attention.

"It is Mrs. Reese's man, Michael," said Tom.

They waited in silence, while the groom threw himself off his horse, over the fence, and came down the field towards them. He had a billet in his hand, which he offered to Polly, who took it eagerly, and read it through.

"Miss Reese says that she has been detained, but that if we will walk on, she will meet us at the pool," she said, turning to Paul; "we must start at once. Tell Miss Reese, if you see her, that we are starting at once," she added to Michael, who had stood touching his finger to his cap while he waited, and who ran back to his horse and was off like the wind.

Polly stood still, and seemed to be listening to the horse's hoofs as they sounded over the bridge, and along the road.

"Shall we go?" said Paul.

Polly turned and looked at him wistfully. "I do not understand it in the least," she remarked. "Miriam herself proposed the walk down the banks of the creek."

"But, then, Miss Chichester," returned Paul, with an enigmatical smile, "don't you know that we are all sometimes in one mood, and sometimes in another. Yesterday Miss Reese liked the notion of the walk, and to-day the idea bores her — that is all."

Polly looked at him gratefully. "That is it, of course. It is too warm to walk, unless one really likes exercise. For a moment," she went on, in a

very soft voice, "I was frightened. It seemed as if something *had happened*. I cannot tell why it is that I am nervous and foolish, and full of presentiments nowadays."

Paul's heart gave a leap. He crossed the stream for the first time, and came up to the young girl.

"Do not let anything disturb you," he said, kindly.

"No, I will not be disturbed. Still, this picnic was Miriam's enterprise. I did not care to come; but papa was away, and she urged it, and I yielded. She ought not to spoil it."

"She shall not spoil it," said Paul, with decision. "It is a beautiful day; everything is propitious; the picnic shall be a success." He gathered up the lunch-baskets, and marshalled the children in front. "Forward, march!" said he, without listening to Polly's entreaties that he would at least divide the load with Tom and herself. He seemed to have leaped with a sudden bound into the feeling of the holiday. He talked incessantly, asked questions, and told stories. They had a walk of a mile before them, along the banks of Cresheim Creek,—one of the little streams that feed the Wissahickon,—at this place a chain of cascades, each of which had, in its day, turned wheels and set looms in motion. In these times, the mills, which used to drown the noise of the waterfalls with the whirr of their shuttles and bobbins, raise their stone walls dismantled, windowless, and roofless to the skies. The spot was new to Paul, and he found some interest in the sight of a

ruined stone village in America, and it gave them, at least, something to talk about, as they trudged along the glen. Having put everybody into a good humor, Paul sank into silence, occasionally emerging from his reverie to utter a word of warning to the boys, who liked to explore every crumbling arch and bit of mason-work, and put some form of danger into the expedition. Polly moved on as if in a dream; lulled into a pleasant feeling of security, she listened to the wimpling of the water over the rocks and stones, and answered the calls of the children as in a dream. She wore a print dress made in the simplest fashion, and a broad-brimmed hat, and looked almost as youthful as her little sister. Paul looked at her occasionally, curious to know of what she was thinking. Now and then, when he helped her over an awkward place, she would say, with sudden repentance, —

“Please give me a basket,—you are so overloaded.”

“Don’t think of me,” he would answer; “I like it.” He found himself in a pleasant mood, although the baskets were certainly heavy and he was uncomfortably warm. He was amused at the position. It had not been his habit to wear himself out in tasks like these. “I could hardly do more if I were their own father,” said he to himself, and then thought benevolently of a possible brood of children of his own,—not for the first time, for he loved children. “I should bring them on many such a jaunt as this,” he thought. He liked the homeliness, the rusticity

of it all. He tried to think what part Miriam would play in a poor man's holiday like this. He tried, too, to realize that probably the children of Miriam would call him father,—and he made an attempt to image their baby faces.' But he could not easily, at that moment, bring Miriam near enough to his imagination to make him feel that the idea was otherwise than fantastic.

"What are you doing up there?" he cried sharply to Polly, catching sight of her on top of a pile of crumbling masonry. "Come down this moment."

She looked at him with a sort of surprise, and descended timidly. "What a child you are," said he. "You are as hard to keep in order as Tom or Robert."

"Please give me a basket. That will keep me in order."

"I will keep you in order. I have been amusing myself by thinking that you were all my children."

"I as well as Lucy and Rob?"

"Yes,—you as well as the others. You are my eldest,—I depend on you a little, so don't do foolish things." He laughed at her and at himself. "I should like you for my daughter," he went on. "It must be a pleasant thought for a man that he has offspring whom he loves and who love him, whose lives belong to him,—whom he can serve, slave for as long as he may, then lean on when he is strong no longer. I have tossed about the world so long, belonging to nobody, and nobody belonging to me,

that I take comfort even in playing with the idea that I am something to somebody."

"You *are* something to somebody, I am sure," said Polly.

"Yes," said Paul, looking^h her full in the face; "I am Miss Reese's accepted lover."

The color quite died out of the girl's cheeks and lips, and he could see that she fought with herself.

"I say it at this moment," he proceeded, "because I feel that I ought to tell you what is so intimate and important to myself. Still, though I say it, at this moment I cannot for my life believe in the reality of my relation to her. It is even more legendary, more dreamlike, than that other fancy I was just telling you of—that I was a hard-worked father, with a brood of pretty children out for a holiday."

Polly had conquered herself. She looked at him with a half-smile.

"It is beautiful for Miriam," she said, softly, "and I am glad—I am glad. I knew that she cared for you."

"Oh, I don't flatter myself highly. Of course for her it is condescension; for me, sheer, undeserved good-fortune."

They walked on in silence. They had skirted a steep hill, and crossed a meadow, and now came to the edge of the Wissahickon woods, into which the creek rushed joyfully, making itself a deep and full current. This they had to cross by a foot-bridge, made of the trunk of a huge hemlock. Paul first went across himself; then, disencumbering himself

of the baskets, returned and carried the younger children over.

“I will come back for you,” he said, smiling at Polly, as he took little Lucy in his arms.

“Oh, no; I can go over by myself.”

Looking back, Paul saw that she shrank from the ordeal; brace herself as she would, she recoiled, trembling.

“Wait!” said he. “Don’t try it alone.”

“No; I *will* come.”

She made three steps forward; then, dizzy at the sight of the brawling stream below, she retreated, feeling helpless and miserable, and covered her face with her hands.

Paul was at her side in a moment.

“Take my hand,” said he.

“I cannot understand what is the matter with me,” she faltered. “I used to be utterly fearless. I have gone over here again and again without a thought. I never was nervous before. It must be because I do not sleep well nowadays.”

Paul looked at her for a moment silently; curious depths of feeling — almost of pain — stirred within him.

“Polly,” said he, “look at me.”

She looked up, and he saw that, as he suspected, there were tears in her eyes.

“I might possibly carry you across,” said he.

“Of course I would not let you carry me.”

“You must do exactly as I bid you.”

She smiled. “I will try.”

"Close your eyes ; now walk on slowly."

He had placed her in front of him, and put a strong hand on each shoulder. Thus guided, Polly was presently across the creek, to the relief of the children, who had regarded this strange progress with dismay.

"You must think me very foolish," she murmured.

"Not at all ; one gets that sort of nightmare dread at times."

"Miriam must be worn out waiting for us by this time," declared Polly, pushing on and leading little Lucy by the hand. The children, even Tom, had grown quiet, recognizing the change which had come over the scene. The bright stream which had laughed and played down the hills and across the meadow had taken on a weird and uncanny aspect, now that it entered the rocky glen under the shadows of the pines and the hemlocks. The strange, unreal light, the luminous green atmosphere had something almost menacing in it. One caught apparent glimpses of swift, indistinct movements in the gloomy depths of the forests on either hand. There were rustlings in the tree-tops, and the brook itself seemed to have found a fear as it rushed on with increasing violence and a new purpose.

"There is the pool," cried Polly. "There is the rock where we are to lunch. But where is Miriam?"

Paul set down the baskets on a flat rock, and looked up and down in a business-like way, calling "Miss Reese" loudly. He then clambered up the rocks above the pool, and sought the inmost recesses

of every possible lurking-place, as if Miriam might be hidden there. He spent some time and strength in accomplishing all this with painstaking effort; yet nothing would have surprised him more than to have found the object of his apparent search. He even called again and again in the remotest places; then, as if he had acquitted himself of his full duty, he came back to Polly, who had seated herself and waited in spent and nerveless expectation.

"I do not see her, Miss Chichester," he remarked. "She has not come yet."

"Is it not strange?" said Polly, fixing her melancholy gaze upon him. "Is it not strange? It seems to me incomprehensible."

"There is nothing strange in it. She may have been delayed, or may have thought it would be later before we reached the place. She may come at any moment."

Polly's eyes were searching his face.

"Mr. Forbes, tell me," she said, forcibly; "please be candid. Did you know anything of this?"

"Of this? Of what? Of Miriam's not coming? What do you think of me? *No!*"

His manner was almost harsh, and she shrank.

"Forgive me," he said, "but you must not doubt me, Polly; you do not doubt me, do you?"

"No; or, if I did, it was only for a moment. Your manner is peculiar to-day. No, I do not doubt you."

"Tell me what to do. Shall I leave you and go see what has become of Miriam? I will obey you,

whatever you order, although I hardly like to leave you here with only the children."

They looked at each other with a full serious glance; then Polly's eyes fell, and she sat silent and abstracted.

"Well," said Paul, presently "what do you decide?"

"I am trying to look at the matter sensibly. Miriam may have been kept by visitors, or Mrs. Reese's ankle may suddenly have got worse. A great many things may possibly have happened which she could not foresee. Here we are, and all there is to do is to eat our lunch and then go back afterwards. The pony carriage is to be at the bridge again by four o'clock. You must be hungry," she added to Paul, with a decisive little nod.

"I am starved. Let us eat something, by all means. In the midst of dubitations, let us have one delightful certainty."

Polly went at the baskets at once, turning anxiously at the least sound, as if expecting that Miriam might yet be coming down the path. Paul felt urged to tell her that it was of no use, — that they had both been Miriam's dupes, and had walked blindly into the pitfall she had prepared for them. He wondered at his own unsuspectingness, after Miriam had intimated her desire to test his feelings towards her. This was the test, the crucible, the ordeal by fire. He said within himself that both Polly and he were in the current of events; no one could tell what might happen now. Everything

must be changed by this foolish inexcusable caprice of Miriam's. Certainly, at this moment, there could be no doubt in his own mind where his duty lay. Towards Miriam he felt bitter and hostile. She had no confidence in his honor. She had no feeling for Polly, who must suffer martyrdom over and over in order that her insatiable inquisitiveness might be satisfied. Nothing would have been so sweet to him, at that moment, as the right to gather the lovely child beside him into his arms and claim her as his own against fate and circumstance and Miriam. But he was not reckless, and this novel, passionate impulse could not instantly obliterate all his experience of life. If he were to offer to Polly what Miriam was flinging away by her suspicion and jealousy, he would at least do it of his own free-will, and not when he was coerced by an awkward situation. He began to feel — he could not help feeling — that what he had all his life dreamt of, sought for, yet never possessed, was close to him to-day: the woman whom he could turn to as he would turn to the kingdom of heaven. Nevertheless, he was afraid of any defiant and reckless instinct; and, if only for Polly's sake, he would to-day think of her, and of her alone, and do whatever seemed kindest and wisest for her.

She, meanwhile, was carefully apportioning the contents of the lunch-baskets into some generous rations, watched and measured by the children with jealous critical eyes.

"You think Miss Miriam will come, after all," said Tom, counting the party twice over, and finding no seventh member to claim the seventh pile.

"No; if Miss Miriam should come, she is certain to bring her own luncheon with her. This is for emergencies."

"Emergencies!"

"Mr. Forbes says he is very hungry, and he might want another sandwich; so we politely set these aside for him."

"And in case Mr. Forbes should not insist on a second supply, I dare say, my dear children," Paul remarked, "that you may divide it among yourselves."

The children were pleased; each grasped his or her ration, and chose a convenient spot for unspoiled enjoyment of the feast.

"This is yours, Mr. Forbes," said Polly; "I wish it were not so plain. Had Miriam come, she would have had all sorts of delicacies."

"I wouldn't apologize, if I were you, Polly," said Paul. "I am grateful to you, — grateful from my very heart."

His look and tone made Polly's lip tremble, — she was on the verge of tears, and he realized by the feeling in his own heart how sore and wounded she was. He set to work to make her forget the vexation of their experience, and perhaps turn it to pleasantness. He told her about the meals he used to look up in Paris in the first years of his student life: how at one café he had on Fridays a very delicious and satisfying dinner beginning with a *potage Julienne* and ending with a *galantine*, with bread and wine à discrétion, for a franc and a half, and how on these

Fridays he always awoke in the morning with a feeling that something pleasant was about to happen. He told her all the circumstances of his going abroad to study art with an income of fifteen hundred francs, this three hundred dollars a year being his sole patrimony after his sister had been dowered. He figured to her the exact meaning of this stipend as a measure of his possible requirements: he told her how much he paid for his clothes, his apartment, his artist's materials. He described his room and his life there; gave her the history of his first success, the admittance of his first picture to the Salon, and its immediate sale for eight hundred francs; and how on the strength of this he at once launched out on a grand scale, certain that henceforth he could easily paint half a dozen masterpieces a year, and feeling that an artist not only required but deserved a congenial *milieu*. He related how he ran about Paris picking up all sorts of delightful bargains: was so enamoured of a mirror held up by cupids that he lavished all his remaining capital upon it; then, when he thought himself completely equipped for housekeeping, from a saucepan to a pair of snuffers, suddenly discovered that he had no chairs, and, being at the end both of his money and his credit, had to be content for a whole year with packing-cases for seats. Still, it was a pleasure to have a mirror held up by cupids!

Polly listened, and the color came back to her face. She laughed, she sympathized, she scolded him for his extravagance, but was ready to contrive

chairs for him, to put chintz covers on his packing-cases and make them beautiful. She was interested still more deeply when he went on to tell her how, from a fear of getting deeper in debt, he took up his pen; how at first it seemed an easy expedient for making money to write up the pictures of a Russian painter, and how, after he had paid for his furniture and *bibelots*, he undertook to raise funds for a journey to Africa and the East. "Had I not sold my first picture for eight hundred francs," said he, "I should not have got those extravagant notions into my head, and I might have been a painter to-day."

"Do you wish you were a great painter?" asked Polly.

"Do I wish I were a great painter?" repeated Paul, and stretched out his arms with a longing gesture. "My hour of agony and revolt comes now and then," he said, looking at her with a half smile and half sigh; "but in general the flowers and grasses grow over my volcanoes."

The children had come back to see what their chance was of a moiety of the contingent lunch Polly had put back into the basket. It was evident to them that their elders did not properly appreciate their advantages. Mr. Forbes had eaten a sandwich or two, but Polly had merely nibbled a biscuit. There would have been something more exasperating in such a squandering of opportunity, had not the hungry brood hoped to profit by it.

"Here, Lucy," said Paul, observing that the elder sister's thoughts were elsewhere, "take all the things

we have not touched—all the cakes, everything in the basket—and carry them across the brook to that flat rock, lay a napkin, spread the table, and invite the boys to partake.”

“All? everything?”

“Yes; all, everything—except your sister’s biscuit.”

The children were off in a moment. Polly had hardly noticed what was going on. She had changed her position a little, and seemed to be gazing beyond the arch of the trees, where the sky showed now resplendent in sunlight and azure, and again dark and shadowed. Her face softened and changed as she looked up at the leafy dome, which trembled and glistened. The infinite murmur of forest voices, from the waterfall, the rapids, the troop of pines and hemlocks, clad in their blue-green verdure, seemed to demand all her listening faculties. Far away, over the Wissahickon, a golden atmosphere, a luminous vapor, floated like a transparent veil.

“What are you thinking of?” Paul demanded, recalling her from her abstraction.

She looked at him with a peculiar, soft glance.

“If,” she murmured, with an air of constraint, “if you marry Miriam, you will be free to take up your artist life again.”

“I have told myself that,” said Paul. He leaned forward and flung a stone into the stream. “Yes,” he said, again, “I have told myself that—that I should have leisure, opportunity. I wonder,” he added, suddenly turning and looking into Polly’s

face, "I wonder if you think I am trying to marry her for her money."

She looked back at him troubled. "No," she exclaimed, passionately, "no. Why should you not love Miriam dearly? She is a woman to win admiration. There is no one so beautiful — none, deep down in her heart, so good. And, besides, I believe in you — I do not think you would marry a woman from interested motives."

"I don't know," said Paul. "I assure you of one thing: it was at first an extremely piquant thought, that I was winning the love of a great heiress. At this moment I hate money. I feel that I can earn a decent living, and I ask no more!" He had spoken with his eyes turned away from Polly, and now he looked back. "She does not trust me," said he. "She is afraid I am mercenary; but she is mistaken."

"Miriam does trust you," cried Polly, "only — only —" Her voice broke; she could not go on.

"No, she does not trust me," said Paul. "Perhaps it is not strange. I have sometimes accused myself of having no pride; but yet I am a proud man. Still I have dismissed vanities, and vanities are a great prop to a man's dignity. I have not set up as a hero; I have not aimed at impressing people with my sublimity; but, all the same, I have tried always to be a decent man and an honorable man. I may seem humble, I may seem subservient, but there are limits to my subservience and my humility." He spoke with vehemence.

“Don’t mistrust Miriam in turn,” said Polly. “She has never been happy. She — ”

“Not happy! Who is happy? What was it about this picnic to-day? I knew nothing about the plan until she sent me a note at ten o’clock.”

“She came over and arranged it yesterday,” said Polly. “I told her that papa was to take Richard and Ned to Princeton to-day, and she planned this at once. She was very eager about it, and I was very reluctant. She silenced all my objections; she insisted that I should dismiss all my scruples and come. She was deeply in earnest. Twice this morning she sent me a message about it. She was coming with me; then, just as I was ready, came word that she had had to pay a visit first.”

Paul uttered an exclamation. He was angry.

“Don’t you see how it all was, Polly?” said he, turning to her, with his face aglow. “All the time she meant it should turn out exactly as it has — she meant not to come. She wanted to try us. She believes that I make love to you whenever I have the opportunity, and she wanted to see what would come of this.” He paused a moment, then added, his face losing its gloom, and brightening, “What will come of it? I don’t know. Do you?”

Polly looked at him with a white face.

“Don’t be angry with Miriam,” she murmured. “It is not that she doubts you; it is something quite different. It is with me she is vexed — not with you.”

As Paul looked into her eyes, he seemed to see

the very depths of a loving, transparent soul. He loved Polly at that moment as he had never in his life loved anything; for his love was full of tenderness and pity. He could not have done less than he did: he stretched out his hand and laid it down on Polly's on the rock. Then there came a silence, broken only by the voice of the water and the leaves, and an occasional shout from the children, who were building a dam.

"We may as well talk it out," said Paul. "What we have both been made to recognize as a fact can hardly be ignored." He glanced into her face, to see if she were listening; then, meeting her full gaze, he forgot to look away. "Coming here as I did," he went on, with a kind glance, "I should never have dared to think of you; yet I will say—I will say this, Polly—from the moment I saw you, it was like nothing else in my life. Ah, ah, Polly, don't feel it so! It was not to be—it is not to be."

She had drawn her hand away from him, and was quivering from head to foot. "God knows," said he, himself moved powerfully, "it would be easy enough to love you; but love is not everything. If I were to lure you from your home, and give you the hard position of the wife of a poor man with only an uncertain career before him, and no chance of accumulating capital, I should be acting abominably. If I were a young man, and believed in my own future, I might perhaps make you believe in it, and consent to share it. As it is, I have little or no faith in

myself. I am not even much of an egoist nowadays. I do not feel as if I had a right to be so happy as you could make me."

For a moment she had shrunk away from him, but now she turned back. She touched his arm, and seemed to be waiting eagerly for him to be silent and hear her.

"You are arguing as if — as if —" She began with vehemence, but could not finish except with a little sob. "You know what I mean," she went on. "But, in spite of all, I want you to marry Miriam. I — want — nothing — else. She loves you dearly; and you — I know you love her dearly. And I want you to be rich — to have a chance in the world; I want you to be happy. It would break my heart to have you fling this great opportunity away, and to be a struggling, poor man; and though you may think — though Miriam may think — that I had some other idea, it is not so. If — I — have — liked you —"

Paul schooled himself. If he let himself be swayed by this timid, entreating, beautiful face, everything would be settled at once.

"Don't say it, dear," he interrupted. "Trust me, I understand. If you like me, be assured that I like you; I like and reverence you down deep, and clear through to your very soul. Look at me, dear, good child. Smile — don't cry. You are a brave girl. There are a good many hard places in life, and this is simply one."

She struggled with herself. She pressed her

hands to her eyes, and bit her lip. "I will be brave," she said, "I will be brave."

"Don't think I am making you bear it all," said Paul, his eyes shining. "Don't call me a poor, spiritless creature for using what knowledge of life I have in your behalf."

"There is just one thing I must say," faltered Polly. "I must say it, even if it kills me: if she is unkind, if she wounds you, it is not actually Miriam, but something in her, which goads her on — something stronger than herself. But if you really love her you can conquer it; only — never — make — her — jealous! And, to do that, you must never look at me any more, never speak to me, — never even think of me."

Paul laughed. He was excited, and his thoughts were an odd jumble; and at the ideas her words called up he could not command himself. "We will see, we will see," said he. "I have not had my free-will where you are concerned, Polly. I have said again and again I would not look at you or speak to you again — I said so this morning — yet here have I forsworn myself."

As he said this, there sounded directly overhead a sharp, sudden clap of thunder, and they both sprang to their feet. The children, who had just contrived a miniature cascade, were equally startled. Gazing upward through the interlaced branches of the trees for a glimpse of the blue sky, they saw only dark vapors scudding before a high wind. At the same moment there came a blast through the ravine, and

the trees seemed first to huddle together before it, then tossed and shivered. The current of cool air brought a clear intimation that the rain was not far off. Paul collected his senses. “We must get out of this as soon as possible,” said he. “Run on, Polly; keep the boys together. Let nobody fall.” Lucy had set up a wail, and he took her in his arms. “What we must aim to do,” said he, “is to reach the shelter of one of those old houses. That will be some protection.”

The whole party passed on. The first thing was to get free of the woods, which grew darker and darker every moment. The brook had lost every ray of light, except here and there where it foamed into rapids, whose whiteness seemed by contrast to double the gloom of the surroundings. The two older boys scrambled on, reckless of everything save to surpass each other in speed. Little Rob was silent, and tried to be brave, clutching Polly’s hand as they tore on. The wind roared unceasingly through the pines and hemlocks. Now and then there was a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder; but the rain kept off. To find themselves on the outskirts of the wood and across the bridge — which had at this moment no difficulty for Polly — was for Paul Forbes to have a chance to breathe freely.

“Thank Heaven we are no longer under that rotten timber,” said he. “It was like a nightmare! I had such a horror of a branch falling on you.”

He looked at Polly. She panted a little; her color came and went. He put his arm about her to help

her on. Outside the woods it was lighter; they could hear the boughs tossing and grinding through the long forests behind them, and it was an intense relief to expect only the rain.

"I am keeping you," said Polly. "Go on as fast as you can with Lucy, Mr. Forbes. The rain is coming."

He caught Rob's hand, and, with Lucy's pretty rosy face and flaxen curls against his shoulder, he made his way up the bank of the stream. It was like a horrible dream which would not end. He could not turn back to see if Polly were safe; he dared not give himself a moment's rest until he had gathered all the four children in some place of safety. After a while he did reach the old stone settlement, and gave Rob and Lucy into the care of the elder boys, who had found a well covered nook under an arch. Great drops of rain had been falling from time to time, but the clouds had not yet unloosed their floods. Just as Paul turned back, however, he was startled by the silence: the wind had suddenly ceased. He heard only the voice of the waterfalls as he ran down the glen looking for Polly. Then a strange sound broke on his ears, swelling and bursting like the noise of breakers on a coast; something seemed to be advancing with the regular tread of a cavalry charge. He called "Polly, Polly!" He heard her answer. But at the instant, everything about him seemed to burst into flame; and simultaneously with the lightning came a crash with the splitting of heavy timbers along with it. The very earth shook under his feet. Half stunned, he stum-

bled and fell, then regained his footing and plunged on. The rain was now descending in floods, and made him blind and deaf. He felt a touch on his hand, stooped, and saw Polly’s face, full of softness and fire; she was crouching under a thicket of alders. He caught her up in his arms, and she nestled there a moment. They were both laughing and crying as they clung to each other.

“In all my life,” said Paul, presently, “in all my life I never suffered as I did in those moments, dreading lest you were hurt.”

There was no chance for any response. The floods almost swept them away. They could do nothing save clasp each other and let the storm sweep over them. Their very footing was insecure. Presently a lull came.

“Now is our chance,” said Paul. “We can reach the children if we push on.”

They contrived, in spite of their drenched garments, to ascend the ravine. An hour later, the shower had passed; the boys had found the pony carriage waiting for them on the bridge, and brought it to the nearest point for Polly to take, and they were all on their road home.

Paul Forbes took his own way back. It seemed to him a twelvemonth since he set out. What had happened in the interval he could not at the moment have told accurately. All he felt was that between his position in the morning and the evening of that day there was a great gulf fixed, and he knew not how it was going to be bridged over.

CHAPTER XXV.

"I, TOO, AM A LOVER."

MIRIAM'S state of mind was not enviable during those hours that she knew Paul Forbes was with Polly in the woods. She had schemed to throw the two together, but what results were to follow she hardly predicted to herself. Certainly the test was not a severe one. Unless both were wholly false and dishonorable, they could instantly break through this net-work of circumstances and show their loyalty and good faith. Thus she argued at the outset, but as the day progressed she found herself growing tremulous: she recalled Paul's look of scorn, the day before, while he listened to her accusations; his evident strain at the curb. He would find this deception hard to forgive. Yet what did she claim from him that he ought not to be glad to yield? It was no trivial thing for her to have accepted him as a suitor. She had it in her power to offer him more than he had wished for or dreamed of — certainly he had no right to reluctance and reserves. She remembered his glance when in the first days of their acquaintance they used to meet in the woods. She rarely saw just that same glowing, ardent expression on his face now. He had known how to captivate her fancy, then had grown insolent with his success.

"He knows that all he needs to do is to prove to me that he does not care for Polly," Miriam said within herself. "Yet he will not say it. He insists that I am absurdly jealous, yet denies my right to be jealous. He likes to play with my feelings — to prolong my torture, and to feel his power over me. He laughs at me, says that I pose as *une femme incomprise*, but that I am only incomprehensible. He is calm and fastidious: he loves harmony and symmetry, — I shock and displease his taste. He does not like the idea of a woman's having impulses, — passions. And if I fail to suit him now, what would it be if I married him, and all illusion and novelty were gone. Perhaps he would not care about me at all. My mother would be his sure ally, — he knows how to please her, — and he could make a life to suit himself; free from all sordid necessities, he could amuse himself as he chose. And what would become of me?"

She brooded over the idea of what an unhappy married life might be: pictured Paul cold to her, wrapped up in his own tastes, using her mother's wealth to develop his own fastidious caprices. Yes, no doubt, she had all through been the dupe of her own imagination: he had divined her irresistible caprice for him, had simply humored it, probably smiling at her infatuation. And yet, had it not seemed as if from the moment of their first meeting there existed between them a mysterious affinity which made unrestrained confidence and intimacy easy to both? She could not let this belief in Paul

go without an overwhelming feeling of sorrow. She longed to punish him,—to touch his heart—to move his conscience! to show him what he had lost. But along with this fierce desire to hurt him went a profound self-pity. Why could he not have loved her? What was there in her which forbade her winning love? He had shown himself to be powerfully moved by her beauty; he had a quick sense for all the resources which her taste in dress gave her command of. Then let him even be indifferent to his own gain, he liked her wealth, liked it in an æsthetic way, as making a varied and poetic background for her daily life. They had close sympathy in their love and knowledge of music and books. Yet he could not love her; with all these coveted advantages within his hold, he could not check himself in this powerful caprice for a young girl who attracted him by her artless, spontaneous admiration, yet had so little idea of what life or even love was that she had not gained the trick of hiding this superfluity of feeling from the world.

“I might safely deride Polly’s love for him, and his interest in her,” Miriam confessed to herself. “He has often enough told me that nothing would induce him to marry a poor woman, and Polly is poor enough. But it is wrong, it is abominable for him to have looked at her at all.”

Yes, if he had ever looked into Polly’s face and uttered a syllable of love, she should like to fling them both off,—never to see them again,—never even to think of them! Would she like to have

them suffer? Suffer? — why not? Had they not made her suffer? Yes, let them suffer, — but not suffer together! No — no — no — not together! Vengeance could wreak nothing on them if they had the consolation of each other's love. They would be happy, and she would be bitterly lonely and miserable. She had to acknowledge to herself that all her life was bound up in Paul; losing him, she lost everything. She would marry him if only to keep him from being happy with Polly. Then she began to weep and sob like a child, with tears and audible bursts of grief.

Yet, although she told herself over and over that Paul actually loved Polly, there came alternate flashes of conviction that she was racking herself with unnecessary tortures. Had she not always made herself miserable by a jealousy and suspicion which were born, not of facts as they actually existed, but from the necessity of being jealous? She remembered a story called "The Curious Impertinent," which showed what the devouring egotism of an inquisitive mind might accomplish. It was about a man who had a wife who loved him and whom he loved; yet he could not content himself in this absolute satisfaction with her as she was, because he felt that he dared not be certain what she might become under other circumstances. So, in order to tempt this faultless virtue, the man threw his wife upon the companionship, the urgent passion of his most intimate friend. "I too am a curious impertinent," said Miriam to herself, suddenly encountering a clear con-

viction that she had thrust Paul into the very dangers she should have guarded him from. What she wanted was that he should love her,—that he should think of and care for no other woman. Yet had she not done her best to heighten Polly's power over him, by keeping the girl perpetually in his thoughts? Had not she herself almost given up trying to please, so insistent had she been that Polly should not please him. She had hardly begun to show him what lay and nestled close in the depths of her own feeling for him. She loved him: forty thousand Pollys could not love him as she did. "His stately step, his noble form, the smile of his mouth, the power of his eyes, and of his speech the witching flow! The pressure of his hand, and ah! his kiss!" Yet she had stormed and raged at him, worn out his respect and his patience, filled him with an invincible repugnance for her ideas. Ah, how was it all to end? How was she to bear his glance, knowing that she had lowered his ideal of her. He could not guess of what thoughts she became the prey; he could not understand the jealousy which she could not govern, but which governed her. No, she must go on making mistakes,—suffering herself, and blindly making others suffer. It was all misery, and there was nothing before her but misery.

These thoughts consumed her while she sat in her room, restlessly wandered about the grounds, sat with her father and mother at table, while she stood at the window and saw the storm sweep over the sky and bend the trees before it as it broke with

fury. She was appalled to think what might be happening if Paul Forbes and Polly Chichester were still in the woods. This actual terror of real harm coming to either usurped her imagination, and for the next hour she had visions, and dreamed dreams which appalled her. All sorts of suddenly revealed possibilities became near to her. Struggling with the sick dread, she sent her own man over to the Rectory with orders to take the pony carriage and go for the party the moment the rain slackened, then she had to sit down with her forebodings, in the darkness, and wait. Certainly Miriam paced with torture in a fiery circle all that day, and knew what punishment was. It made her tremulous with gratitude to hear that Polly and the children were at last safe at home. Of late, Miriam had experienced a scorn, almost a hatred, of Polly; now she clung to her with a sort of remorseful tenderness, as to a possession one has been on the brink of losing.

Sure that they had escaped disaster, her mind next turned to the idea of meeting Paul Forbes that evening. She dressed for him; had the gardener search the place for the flowers she wished to wear to please her lover. She had no doubt but that he would come. He would not dare not to come. It would be an intolerable effort for her, at first, to raise her eyes and find in his the record of his day's thoughts of her, his judgment of her. Hitherto, when they had had differences, there had always been a reconciliation, which was as sweet to her as the

warm, soft rain to parched flowers. The idea of her own wrong-doing was becoming more clear to her mind, and illuminated every ugly instinct she had yielded to. She wanted absolution; she would not need to confess; Paul knew it all. She sat at the piano playing Chopin's Preludes while she awaited him, and when Edward Jasper was shown in she sprang toward him with a smile and a greeting that dazzled him.

Edward was shrewd enough, however, not to claim another man's welcome. "It is only I," said he, standing still, and not advancing to take the outstretched hand. "The fact is, Forbes came over to spend the evening with my mother, so I thought it a good occasion to say my good-by to you."

"I did not know that you were going away," said Miriam, who still stood touched with that radiance of gladness, and her vexation and constraint retaining the flush on her face, "Why are you going away? And where are you going to?"

Edward came up and took her hand.

"I am going out West," said he, softly; "and if you ask me why I go, I can only say that you are the reason."

"I am sure," said Miriam, looking in his face and smiling, "that I do not want you to go, so do not lay your going to me. But sit down and tell me about it."

She sat down on a sofa, and Edward took his place close beside her.

"You know," he began at once, "that I gave up architecture?"

"Yes, I know that."

"You see I had to go away," said Edward. "I couldn't stay here, not if I died for it. And if I go on living I must have something to do,—not to talk about, or experiment on, but to do. I want work, and not empty babble about work. So far, everything I have tried has been mere theory and dilettanteism; now I want to go at my career in sober earnest. My father will give me five thousand dollars, and with that I shall buy and stock a small ranch. I am not ambitious. I shall not attempt too much. I want to begin and understand everything—to keep myself within the limits of what I do understand. Hitherto my fault has been that I was a little vague. I shall begin anew."

"How far are you going?" asked Miriam, in a low voice.

"I shall settle in Colorado or Arizona. It depends on what I find to suit my means."

"That is a long way off."

"Yes, a long way off. I would go to another planet, if I could."

"So would I." Edward looked at her, and shook his head.

"Torn up by the roots as I am," he continued, "I should like to find a new heavens and a new earth altogether."

"Torn up by the roots!" repeated Miriam, with a startled air, but with her thoughts far away from Edward. "That is a singular expression—but I understand it. I myself have never had any roots,

—that is, deep-down roots. I am an air-plant. Don't you think so?"

"No, I don't," said Edward. "You like to seem a capricious creature. But I know you better. I do not think you have hitherto been very happy. I wish I could try the experiment of taking you along with me; I should like to give you a glimpse into a different life, and see if it would not make you happy."

"I never was happy anywhere yet," said she.

"Yet," said he, "it is the thought that your life is complete, rounded off, and perfectly happy, which drives me away." He spoke with feeling, and turned his animated face towards her. He put his hand on hers. "Don't you remember," said he, "what Correggio said before the pictures in the Vatican, 'Anch' io sono pittore.' I feel at this moment, 'I too am a lover.' Paul Forbes is not here, and your whole face shows me that you are not happy, and it goes to my heart. It makes me tell you what I have of late thought I should never tell you,—that I love you dearly,—that I have never cared, I shall never care for any other woman but yourself. Let me say it,—a man who is going so far away is like a dying man,—he ought to be allowed to save his soul by confession."

As Miriam sat beside Edward, she had at first been compelled to hide an acute sense of mortification and disappointment. Paul had not come, he would not come to-night; perhaps he would never come again. She was tortured, irritated by the

fear that he was gravely offended: the idea of his displeasure took all sorts of shapes, and each one threatened her. She was lost in a chaos. Could it be that she had put all her future happiness in jeopardy by this strange freak? She had longed to punish Paul, but now she seemed to see the retribution she had meant for him drawing irresistibly towards herself. With all these feverish images in her brain, to have Edward remind her that he suffered because he believed her to be happy, wholly unnerved her. She lost her self-control; and when his warm clasp fastened upon her hand, she had a quivering imaginative sense of sympathy and comfort in his tenderness, which made her sobs and tears break out.

"I am not happy," she faltered, "I am an utterly wretched woman. You say you love me: I cannot tell whether you love me, or not, — all that I know is that in all the world there is no one else who loves me."

Edward gazed at her as if lost in astonishment.

"Have you broken with Forbes?" he asked.

A shudder passed over her. "He will break with me. He is terribly angry, — I know it, — I feel it." She sobbed again.

"Why should he be angry with you? Is that why he did not come to-night? He told my mother he felt tired and cross, and wanted something quiet and comfortable."

As their eyes met he was struck by her pallor: her lips were white and quivering.

"Let me tell you everything," she whispered. "You are kind, you are good, and you are not ready always to find fault with me. Let me tell you what I have done. I have tried him too much. I wanted to satisfy myself,—I might have known—I ought to have known what would come of it."

This fitful, vague confession puzzled Edward.

"Tell me anything you like," said he. "As for my judging you harshly, Miriam, you know very well that I believe in you. Tell me how you and Forbes stand. I confess I supposed you were engaged,—just waiting for your mother's consent, or something."

"I will tell you," Miriam burst forth. "I am so tired of going by my own unaided judgment, I should like to trust myself to some one's guidance; just as if I were a little child." She met his full pitying glance, and she went on in a broken voice. "It was from the very first, you know, from the very first time we met—he was like no one else to me."

Edward half turned away from her. "I knew it," he muttered, "knew it all the time."

"I never tried to hide it from him," continued Miriam, "and in a little while he had said things—he had said things which a man would only say if all his hopes hung on a woman's liking. It was all in secret, too,—nobody knew,—my mother refused at first to see him. We used to meet in the woods, day after day, day after day. It was beautiful

weather; I felt sure then that all I had longed for was coming to pass,—it was easy to trust him then. He said he was poor; I knew that there must be a powerful attraction in the idea that I was an heiress,—but I trusted him. It really seemed to me that he cared for me, for *me* independently of the thought that I was to be an heiress."

"I am sure he did," said Edward, warmly. The deep sincerity of his tone, and his pitying glance, melted Miriam, and the tears welled up to her eyes.

"Yes, I think he cared about me then," she went on. "It was not until my mother took up so much of his time that he began to change—not until he became such good friends with Polly—"

Edward uttered an exclamation.

"With Polly!" he repeated, blankly. "Do you mean to suggest that Forbes cared for Polly?"

Miriam nodded, and looked at Edward with an eager, questioning gaze. She hoped, perhaps, that he would say something that should make all her doubts and fears fall away, for her eyes fastened on his face with an intense yearning.

"I cannot believe that there was anything in it," Edward said, reluctantly. "He admired her, of course,—who could help it? And, now I think of it,—I remember how she pulled him out from under the horse's feet that day he fell. She may have saved his life. But"—Edward may have found a momentary hope from this accusation; but now he gave a bitter little laugh, and shook his head. "I dare say he is grateful to her,—is touched by her, poor

little brave, hard-working; happy Polly; but mark my words, Miriam, he would not have thought of loving her while he could turn to you. She is like moonlight to your sunlight—like water compared with the wine you offer. Why, you do not know yourself. My God! the idea of your being jealous! It is actually laughable.”

Put on her defence in this way, Miriam began again. She built up the entire fabric of Paul's acquaintance with Polly, constructing it little by little, confessing how at first she herself had told him he must not draw attention to their growing intimacy by approaching her, but must, instead, talk to others, when he had invariably turned to Polly. There had been a whole chain of accidental circumstances which had linked the two together; she described their encounter in the clock-pavilion. She told of Polly's confession.

“Don't judge me hardly,” she said, imploringly.

“No, I will not,” said Edward. “It was a matter of life and death to you. I can see that.”

Then she described her last interview with Paul, and the state of mind in which it had left her. How she had felt that, since he was unwilling to satisfy her, she must settle the question for herself. She must throw him into Polly's society for hours, and see how he bore the crucial test.

“How were you expecting to find out?” demanded Edward, with an honest wonder.

“I do not know,” said Miriam. “Yet I was certain that I should discover what went on. I believed

at first that I might follow them and be a spy upon their conduct — but I could not do that — "

"Of course you could not do that! Come, now, it was all a silly joke, which you evidently repented of before it was carried out. Of course Forbes would not like it," pursued Edward. "No man would like it. If he did not make love to Polly under these circumstances, he was unlike anything in my experience. I tell you, a woman has a better chance of attaining a man's complete devotion by an excess of magnanimity, by a generosity which allows her to forget her own claims, than by jealous precautions. You see, Miriam, I don't try to flatter you; I esteem you too much, — to say nothing of loving you too much. If I were Forbes — "

He paused a moment, and looked into Miriam's face, which was resolute and pale. "Go on," she said, in a strange voice.

"If I were Forbes," he continued, "I should believe that you did not love me. What! love a man, — profess even a friendship for him, — and strike such a blow at him as that?"

Miriam started up.

"I cannot hear any more to-night," she said, in a manner which was calm, but yet unnatural. "You have made everything more clear to me than it was. I must think it over. But you do not take one thing into account, Edward: I am not a poor girl. I could give the man I" —

"Are you talking about your lord and master, or a servant and a hireling?" demanded Edward. "If

I had the happiness to stand in Forbes' shoes, I should hate the idea that your mother is so rich. I should long to carry you away from all this infernal luxury—these pictures, this contemptible bric-à-brac. What does it profit a man to gain all the world if he risks his own soul?—by that I mean his dignity, his peace of mind, his leisure of thought, and power of will! What you need, Miriam, is to marry a man who will take you away from all that has fretted and cramped your existence. You are broken to pieces by the wear and tear of your unused energies. Come with me; give up civilization. We will live like noble savages, ride over the prairies, and feel the fresh, keen wind in our faces. On my soul, I have a mind to carry you off in spite of yourself; I verily believe that you would be happy.”

“You tempt me,” said Miriam, smiling in spite of her dreary mood, and struck by something in Edward's face which she had never seen before—the sort of look a man might wear when ready to wrestle with man or devil for what he wants. “But I will not promise to go to-night. Certainly I am sick at heart of all I have known—this inane life; nothing to trust or believe in—” She broke off with a little fierce gesture. “Good-night,” she said, and walked straight out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

POLLY'S TROUBLES.

THE next morning, Dr. Jasper was waiting for Miriam when she left the breakfast-table.

"I want somebody to look after Polly Chichester," said he. "The girl is ill. Her father is away, and the boys can do little or nothing for her. I thought that you might send your maid or —"

Miriam had uttered a little cry at the news. She caught the Doctor's arm. "Really ill? Is Polly really ill?" she asked, in an excited way. "Don't tell me she is ill!"

"Nothing to be alarmed over; but she has a good deal of fever, and I do not like her symptoms. She got wet through in the shower yesterday, and did not sleep at all last night. Somebody ought to look after her to-day — see that she stays in bed, is kept quiet, and fed regularly, while awake, on a wineglass of milk an hour."

"Why, Polly is never ill!" said Miriam.

"At all events, her temperature is 104° at the present moment, and her pulse 140. I call that ill," said the Doctor, grimly. "And she may get worse, instead of better, unless she is well cared for. What I want to know is, whether you will undertake to

see that she is nursed, — or shall I go to the Redmonds? I want some responsible person."

"I will go this instant," said Miriam. "Only give me full directions."

"I have given her an anodyne," said the Doctor, "and I will send some other medicine; look at the label, and obey orders. And, as I say, give her a wineglass of milk once an hour, if she keeps awake."

"Nothing but milk?"

"Nothing but milk. What else does she want? Just follow my directions, and don't give her a spoonful of anything else. I sometimes think the devil is in people to play with their doctors' orders. A doctor may not know much, but he ought to know enough to say 'eat nothing and drink less,' until you are better."

Having said so much, in his odd decided way, and with a look on his face as if he felt some dread for somebody he loved, Dr. Jasper turned and went out.

Ten minutes later, Miriam crossed the threshold of Polly's room. Tom was sitting at the bedside; and she motioned him away, and took his place. Polly had suddenly fallen asleep, he whispered, a quarter of an hour before. The room was so dark that, coming in from the bright sunshine, Miriam's eyes had to become accustomed to the light before she could distinguish the white face on the pillow from the draperies of the bed. She heard the quick irregular breathings, then made out the little clenched hands, which clutched the counterpane; finally, could

perceive that the head was thrust uncomfortably back, a little on one side, the chin sharply raised. The whole attitude suggested the extremity of illness, and Miriam was smitten by a terrible presentiment. Polly's admirable health and elasticity of temperament had always been accepted as a part of herself. But Miriam seemed to recall hearing that people similarly endowed were most in danger when suddenly thrown off their balance. And Polly certainly looked to her at this moment very ill; her face was haggard and weary; in fact, she was hardly recognizable now that the dark, deep, beautiful eyes were closed, and the parched lips strained apart. Every breath seemed to give her pain.

Thus watched, Polly continued to sleep. The sun, entering at the chinks of the shutters, made two long beams of light, which gradually travelled across the floor, touched the mirror, the table, and finally the bed, lighting up with a nimbus the bright disarray of hair on the pillow. Miriam stole softly to the window, to readjust the curtains, and shut out the intrusive rays. Happening to look down through the closed blinds as she stood there, she caught a glimpse of Paul Forbes on the gravelled path, his eyes raised towards the window. Miriam cast a look at the sleeper, whose attitude grew all the time a little more relaxed; then, recrossing the room stealthily, she descended the stairs, went out the door, and stood on the steps, beckoning Paul.

He came towards her with an alert air, with an intensely serious face. "Is she really ill?" he

asked, without any form of salutation, seeming, in fact, so preoccupied as to be unconscious whom he was addressing. "Dr. Jasper told me she had evidently had a high fever all night."

"She has slept since nine o'clock," said Miriam, "but she looks to me extremely ill."

"She was wet to the skin, — wet to the skin," asseverated Paul. "She was not well before. — she told me she was not well."

His agitated glance met Miriam's; her lips trembled, and her eyes wandered away from his.

"Could I see her?" he asked, eagerly and peremptorily.

"Could you see her?" Miriam repeated, as if bewildered. She stared at him incredulously, as if his words suggested something she could not wholly believe. "I am sure I hardly know what to answer."

"I want to see with my own eyes just how ill she is," Paul declared, with an imperative gesture. "I feel as if I could not endure this suspense."

Miriam had a painful, an intolerable sense of ignorance and impotence. "I do not like to take any responsibility," she said, reluctantly. "Her father is away, — it seems to me as if" — she broke off, trembling all over. "Paul, Paul," she faltered, under her breath, "have you actually the right to —"

He regarded her with a strong, steadfast glance.

"I have no right, — except the right of humanity," said he, sternly. "But what I feel is this, Miriam, that if she is ill, — very ill, — if — she —

should — die, — you and I, between us, will have killed her.”

Miriam made a swift gesture, as if to thrust him back, moved away from him, and disappeared inside. Paul followed her for a few steps, feeling as if everything he had or hoped for in life were staked on his chance of gaining one glimpse of the sick girl; then recalling realities, he stopped short, and stood at the foot of the staircase for a time, his eyes sunk on the ground. At last he put his hat on his head, and went out, gazing back at the windows of Polly's room until he was out of sight.

Miriam, meanwhile, had darted up stairs, entered the darkened bed-chamber, closed the door, and turned the key, as if to exclude Paul. Her head was whirling: everything was confusion in her thoughts. Something had happened: yes, something definite had happened. She had foreseen it all, yet she was taken by surprise: it was a thunderbolt, it stunned her, yet along with the thunderbolt was a lightning flash of clear illumination. She had a new and powerful sensation of resolve. She knew what she was going to do. All the future was revealed to her. Yet, although she could concentrate her will on a certain course of future conduct, she was yet tremulous with all sorts of fugitive impressions. It seemed as if two opposing forces were trying each to usurp control of her future. Again and again, Paul Forbes seemed to say: “If she should die, you and I, between us, will have killed her.” Again his voice sounded in her ears with a passionate

intonation. "I feel as if I could not bear the suspense." Another moment and she was crying out to Edward Jasper that she was a wretched woman; and he seemed to answer: "Let us ride together, forever ride," and she had a feeling of being carried through the air, or Polly seemed to be once more at her feet, pulling her dress, and looking up and imploring forgiveness. Then she heard again that relentless, "If she should die, you and I, between us, will have killed her." Miriam stole up to the bed, and looked at Polly. What, die? — with all the heaven of Paul Forbes's love in prospect for her! Die? She could have laughed aloud at the idea of Polly's dying. The girl was already better; she had turned a trifle on her side; one of the little hands had released that clutch at the counterpane, and now supported the cheek. The flush was leaving the face: sleep, or that messenger of tender loyal love, was bringing her healing. No, Polly would not die. She should live, and live for Paul. Could Miriam at that moment have made the two one, settled their destinies unalterably, and then flung after them all her mother's wealth, she would have done it.

She had to unfasten the door and admit the Doctor, who had come for his mid-day visit. He sat down, felt the pulse, took the temperature, counted the respirations, listened at the chest, he talked loudly; — but the sleeping girl did not awake: even when she was fed, she only opened her eyes once, to sink back into a deeper slumber.

"Let her sleep on," said he. "I think, when she

wakes, she will be out of danger. I don't want Polly to die! do you?"

"She will not die now," said Miriam. "Some things cannot happen, you know, and that is one."

"Don't be too sure," said the Doctor. "If she should wake and complain of any sort of pain, send for me on the instant."

Then Miriam was left alone again; with all her thoughts to buzz about her like bees. People tiptoed in and out occasionally. Lorraine Redmond sat for a while with her: her dinner was brought, — there came a little note from Paul, just a word or two, sent to reassure and tranquillize her. "I hear how beautifully you are nursing her, and that she is likely to be better soon. I was anxious this morning, and spoke harshly. You see, I blamed myself for allowing her to be exposed to the shower yesterday." Miriam smiled as she read this, — smiled dangerously. She might be able to lure him back yet. Polly would not die; — after all, nothing had actually been said or done to make a difference. Everything might go on. Miriam had a singular sense that day of near things being far off and far off things being near. Unaccountably she recalled her girlhood; — how she had learned to use a rifle, and had shot a dozen birds. Among them was an orange-colored thrush, and she remembered how its head drooped as it lay with ruffled feathers. The sight haunted her continually; it made her ill, and all through her illness, which lasted a week with some severity, she heard a thrush singing, and the

sound seemed to drive her mad. Singular to say, the fantasy was repeated to-day ; and as her temples beat and her ears rang, she heard that strain again. Was it that same thrush she had killed, or was it a bird that had once sung to her and to Paul in the woods? She remembered all her meetings with him ; — their walks along the banks of the pond : she recalled one night when they sat side by side on top of a coach coming home from a distance with a large pleasure-party ; — when the clouds were rolling off the sky, separating into fleecy masses lighted up radiantly in places by the hidden moon, and opening here and there great rifts into the dark blue vault in which were set the stars. Her hand, touching Paul's, all the time hidden by the folds of her cloak, — she had sat quiet, looking up, and feeling an inspiring sense of the remote and infinite, quickened by the comfort and sympathy of the finite. If she could have died then, — if she could but die now remembering it !

Polly wakened drowsily towards midnight, knowing no one ; then slept again. It was almost noon next day when Miriam, who had hardly left her place by the bedside, was suddenly startled to perceive that Polly's eyes had opened, and were fastened upon her with a bright, curious gaze. Miriam bent forward, and face to face the two girls regarded each other in silence for a moment. Then Polly exclaimed, "Why, dear Miriam, how kind of you !"

—

Miriam put out her hand and caressed the soft, round cheek.

"Are you better?" she asked.

"Have I been ill?" asked Polly, puzzled. "Oh, yes; I seem to remember that the Doctor was here."

Miriam brought some milk. "Drink this," she said.

Polly swallowed the draught, and looked round the room.

"What time of day is it?" she asked.

"About noon."

"Dear me! how I have slept!" She stretched out her arms. "How odd! I feel so weak!" she exclaimed. "Am I ill?"

"I hope you are better. You were tolerably ill yesterday."

"Yesterday? Was it yesterday? I remember the Doctor's putting his thermometer under my arm, and asking all sorts of questions. He gave me a powder. Was it an anodyne? The idea of my being ill! Is papa at home?"

"No; not yet."

"Do you mean that I slept all day yesterday, and all last night, and all to-day? How droll it seems! I never believed in Rip Van Winkle before. But it is a good while since I have slept, and one has finally to sleep, has one not? And when I went to bed last night,—or when was it I went to bed? How odd it all is! Well, the last time I came to bed, I could not stay in bed at all. The moment I put my head on the pillow it began to throb and beat, and

my heart threatened to suffocate me; then I was so warm, the room was so close! It seemed easiest to walk up and down; so I walked up and down, up and down. Yet the night did not seem to me long, and presently it was breakfast time, and I was trying to dress; but I seemed to have no power to dress. Tom found me, and was frightened, and made me come to bed; and then the Doctor was here—I remember it all now.”

“But you must not talk,” said Miriam; “you are feverish still, and weak. You must not talk.”

“Oh, but I must talk,” said Polly. “It will do me good to talk,—that is, to talk to you! Miriam, dear Miriam, it is such a comfort to see you here,—tending me, looking at me as if you loved me.”

They clasped hands.

“Often,” murmured Polly, “I have felt of late that there was some barrier between us, Miriam. It is all gone now, is it not? There is nothing to hinder you from loving me to-day—I see it in your eyes.”

Miriam leaned over and kissed her. Her cheek was wet.

“You know how to say these things,” she said, after a little, with a half smile; “but I have not the wit or the tact to do so. But yet, Polly, I have it in my heart to do a great deal for you. Know me henceforth by my fruits. Only get well.”

“Oh, I am getting well every minute,” said Polly. She looked wistfully at Miriam, whose face showed the ravages left by some deadly struggle of feeling.

There was no look of victory yet. A thousand confessions burned on Polly's tongue, which she longed to utter. But she only asked, "Has Lorraine been here?"

Yes; Lorraine had been to see her again and again, Miriam replied; would have stayed all night had she been permitted to do so.

"Do you see anything odd about Lorraine in these days?" asked Polly. "When I was walking about the room the other night, I was laughing and wondering to think of it. I longed to talk it over with you. For, can you believe it, Lorraine is in love! Did I tell you what she said to me the day of your mother's picnic? 'Polly,' she said, with an air of intense earnestness, 'Polly, let us promise each other never to marry!' I said it hardly seemed right to bind one's self unnecessarily like that. Then she began to talk about a possible duty — that it might become a girl's duty to marry a widower with young children. I was so puzzled to know what she was talking about! The idea of anybody daring to think of marrying Lorraine, and of her being willing to think of marrying anybody, even the most abject and helpless of widowers, even at the urgent call of duty! 'Oh, what a dear, absurd child she is!' I thought to myself. 'Always going out of her way to settle all sorts of unnecessary questions — whether the universal Kosmos is in a state of progression or degeneration, has æons ahead or is tottering to its fall; whether modern occult science is a survival or a new discovery; or whether it might become a

woman's duty to marry a widower with young children! I wondered if she had possibly taken it into her head that papa must be protected and his family looked out for. The idea of any of the Redmond girls discussing marriage as a possible alternative — and above all Lorraine! But presently my bewilderment was at an end. Bertie Jasper came up to us, and by the way he looked at her, and the way she looked at him, I knew it was not papa — no widower, in fact, — only Bertie. Had you guessed it, Miriam? Bertie is in love with Lorraine!"

"Very likely. But what I am thinking of is Bertie's father, — that he will scold me for letting you talk."

"Oh, never mind Dr. Jasper. I am going to have a mind-cure, just as your mother had. I feel perfectly well. I am bubbling over, I have so many things to tell you. Last night — was it last night? — it was the night after — the shower, — Lorraine came over and took tea with me. That is, she came over, and Bertie with her; but he would not stay. And she was talking about her college plans: college opened in ten days, and she had all sorts of preparations to make for going away. She took so high and mighty a tone; she posed as if so far beyond my comprehension and my sympathy; she repelled with such decision all my suggestions, and took it so ill when I ventured to say that we should miss her, that I thought it was time for me to begin. Accordingly, I remarked that she was about to enter a career which suited her, and among people who

would appreciate her unique ambitions and her lofty indifference to what was pleasant in life. Evidently, Sycamore Hill would have to go on without her; yet I said we hoped to be gay; that I myself was intending to give a series of afternoon teas; that it would never, never do to let Bertie Jasper find the place dull, and, with such a handsome young man always at hand, social life might be kept up to the most elegant standard. 'I don't think you quite appreciate Mr. Herbert Jasper,' said Lorraine, with some asperity. 'My dear child, talk of something you know about,' I replied. 'Bertie Jasper is like my daily bread, — I have had him all my life.' 'But yet you do not appreciate him,' Lorraine persisted. 'There is a great deal that is earnest, even profound, about him. I dare say you think he is merely frivolous, that —' And what do you think, Miriam, while she was insisting upon his possession of these solid qualities, she first blushed, then turned pale, then blushed again, and began to sob and cry, and before I could even get to her and comfort her she ran away, — ran with all her might out of the door, and was outside the gate. What do you think of that?"

"I think you are talking too much," said Miriam. "I am only thinking about you — that I hope you are really better, — that, —"

"You see," said Polly, "there is something else I am leading up to. Something I want to tell you, — that I want you to know."

"Never mind it now."

"I want to get it over," persisted Polly. "I shall be better when it is off my mind. Now, when Lorraine asked me, the other day, to promise not to marry, I felt as if I could not. But I have changed my mind since. I am ready—I am eager now to promise not to marry anybody. I had never had an offer then, and it always seemed to me that it must be a wonderful experience to have an offer. And if anybody made me an offer, I was certain that I should be so flattered that I should surely accept it. But I have had an offer since—"

She was holding Miriam's hands, and she felt them turn cold in her clasp. All the color had gone out of Miriam's face and the light from her eyes, but she said, calmly, —

"So you have had an offer."

"Yes, I have had an offer. Papa asked me one day if I was aware that Mr. Trowbridge Archibald came to the house a great deal and sent flowers perpetually? 'Now,' said papa, 'I am not his object, and you are. I will not have you receiving his bouquets and encouraging him to come unless you honestly like him. So make up your mind whether you are ready to accept him as a suitor or wish him sent to Jericho.' At that time I told papa I should prefer to have the young man sent to Jericho, but afterwards I pondered over the subject, and it came over me like a flash that every woman had a destiny, and that Mr. Archibald was no doubt mine, and that I had better not quarrel with fate, lest worse should be in store for me. He evidently appreciated me, was

generally good-natured, and, although he was not exactly easy to entertain, he was easy to ignore, which is almost equal. And, really, although I did not like his chin, nor his cheeks, I had heard him called good-looking; he dressed well, and he was honest and good, and I have heard that dull men who bore women before they are married make the best husbands in the long run.

“Then, Miriam, you approved him; and to please you—to make you feel satisfied with me, it seemed to me I would tread on burning ploughshares. So I quite decided, and I told papa I had decided to accept Mr. Archibald if he offered himself. Papa demurred, and said I had no idea what I was talking about. But that night, no sooner had Lorraine run away than Mr. Archibald was shown in. I felt that my hour had struck, that destiny was carrying things with a high hand. I was all alone: the children were in bed; the boys were away with papa, and here was the young man coming towards me, with an unmistakable look on his face. My heart came up in my throat; but I reflected that it would soon be over and settled if I helped him a little. So I told him that papa was away, and that, except Katy, I was all alone in the house. He kept smiling and smiling; I think he knew papa was away. He took a chair a little way from me, and said that he came out to Sycamore Hill a great deal, that he hated railway trains, and detested suburbs; that he had studied nothing but time-tables all summer. And he laughed as if that were the most delightful

joke, and so did I, although I felt vexed, and wished he would not beat about the bush. Yes, he went on, there must be a powerful attraction to draw him here,—a powerful attraction; that I must have some idea what the powerful attraction was; I tried to smile, and indicate that it was my sole ambition to live up to his idea of me, but I felt my whole face stiffen. He went on to tell me how much his sister liked me, and that he himself—oh, Miriam! you must guess what he said,—I can not tell it, and I have no right to tell it. I let him go on,—I intended to accept him,—I kept wishing he would come to an end and finish it, for I had no idea but of saying, yes, yes, yes, anything; and of being engaged to him. What he said was bungling, but it was kind,—he was all in a glow, and I—I—kept getting colder and colder. I shivered from head to foot, although my head and my eyes burned. And after a while, when it seemed to me he had been talking forever, he jumped up and came towards me,—‘Will you be my wife, Miss Chichester?’ said he, and, Miriam, in spite of all my resolution and my will, I had a perfect horror of his even coming near me! I cried out to his question, ‘Oh no, no, no; please go away!’ and I began to cry and shake all over with sobs. ‘Do you mean you won’t have me?’ he said, after a little while. ‘I mean it with all my heart,’ said I, and covered my face. When I looked up again, he was gone.”

She covered her face now; she was trembling.

“Miriam,” she faltered, presently, “forgive me for

not doing it. But I could no more marry him than I could commit a crime. I did not understand anything about what it all meant until I saw him coming towards me. Then, I knew it could not be, it never could have been, and never ought to be. I should like to have pleased you, dear. But I see it all clearly now. It is not so easy to marry, and I shall never marry anybody. I will promise sacredly never to marry, never, never !”

“I would not have you promise that,” said Miriam. “Nor do I any — longer — wish — to — have — you — marry Trowbridge Archibald.”

“I don’t know what it was,” said Polly, with a queer little smile ; “but there was something in me too slippery to get hold of.”

They looked at each other seriously.

“Miriam,” said Polly, after a little pause, “I want to get rid of something else which is on my mind. I must say one word about Mr. Forbes. He was sorely tried that day when you did not come ; sorely tried. It was bitter to him that you had no faith in him. Besides, he resented the fact that I was, against my will, placed in a false position. But, all the same, he was good, and wise, and strong, all through. I myself was foolish, — I was very foolish, but his counsel and his sympathy helped a good deal. I wanted to say this, — You love him, and he loves you ; something has separated you of late, — but now it is gone, and I want you to let your two loves join again, — without a sign of what has passed, without a single scar.”

Miriam did not speak: there was a soft illumination on her face.

"You believe me, do you not, Miriam," insisted Polly. "You must believe me. He was good,—he is good. You believe it, do you not?"

"Yes, I know that he is good," Miriam answered. "I always felt that, from the first. I am glad he helped you, Polly. Keep where a good man's counsel and sympathy can help you."

"Have you seen him since?"

"Yes; I saw him yesterday. He was anxious about you, and came to ask."

"Is everything right between you now?"

"Yes, everything is just as it should be."

"Oh, I am glad," murmured Polly, "I am glad, glad, glad. I have not a care in the world then. If I were just a little stronger, I should like to dance about, or do something ridiculous, but I feel oh,—so sleepy, as if,—as if—everything were dropping away—as if—"

Her murmur died away. She had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SHAKSPEARE DINNER.

POLLY was so much better by the time of Dr. Chichester's return that he was not obliged to miss Mrs. Reese's dinner to the Shakspeare Society, which came off about this time. This banquet was offered as a sort of *amende* by the great lady, who felt that she had been indifferent to her husband's cherished pursuits, and had nourished unworthy suspicions of the whole Shakspeare Society. It was intended, besides, as the fitting celebration of her own introduction to the club, for she had prevailed upon her husband to let her attend the first of the autumn meetings. She had spent time and pains, to say nothing of money, in perfecting the arrangements, and, as usual, had pressed Paul Forbes's skill and invention into her service. Each dinner card bore an etching of his design, and a text from THE PLAY: while the *menu* bristled with Shakspearian quips and quiddities. Mrs. Reese was the only lady at table, and, flanked by Dr. Chichester and Paul Forbes, presided majestically over the feast. She was a happy woman that night; it was the crowning moment of her career; nothing failed her. Her eyes sparkled; the diamonds in the aigrette which surmounted her coronet

of hair glittered and glistened. She gave each of her guests a smile like a benediction. She was in better spirits than her husband, whose heart quaked a little at the thought that this imperious and magnificent woman was to be admitted to the sacred rites of the society. Yet Mr. Reese cheered up under the influence of the good dinner. It was sure to make him wretched to-morrow; but, for the moment, it was as well to enjoy life, and eat all the croquettes he wanted. The conversation did not languish: each man felt at liberty to say something about his favorite subject.

"Nine courses," remarked Dr. Chichester, studying the *menu*. "It is certainly a very highly civilized way to dine, to have nine courses, to say nothing of dessert."

"Extremes meet," said Edward Jasper. "The highly civilized man who dines often on nine courses finds chaos and barbarism awaiting him in the consequences, — indigestion, biliousness, gout, doctors."

"No doubt," said the Rector, "if we all saw the consequences of this good dinner as you do, we might reject these viands, — as it is, I like to profit by my present advantages, without asking if I am sacrificing my future for it. Don't you, Dr. Jasper?"

Dr. Jasper looked at the Rector in a bright, meditative way, and then said: "Did it ever occur to you, Chichester, that we have continual reason to be thankful that most people are fools?"

“They don’t find us out, you mean?”

Dr. Jasper went on to elucidate his remark: there should not be, he declared, in any community, more than four or five actually superior persons: here and there, it might be essential to have one enlightened man, in order to furnish the requisite invention and good sense to meet an emergency: the rest of the population should be, he thought, a little under the mark. What would clergymen do with a congregation of first-class minds? They would be obliged to turn out quite a different sort of discourse from the pointless drivel and abject commonplace they usually found acceptable. And, as for doctors, he frankly confessed that he was perpetually grateful for the preponderance of fools in the world. What would become of his income suppose people had a glimmering of insight into the reasons of things; lived reasonably, dressed properly, ate and drank wisely. Sometimes, he went on to say, watching the law of cause and effect, and seeing how another man’s over-eating and taking cold, and a woman’s nervous hysterics, had enabled him to earn enough to support his own family, — he could not help being thrilled with an exquisite sense of the perfection of the universal sequence of things by which a means so simple answered an end so different, and apparently so remote.

Mr. Brainerd remarked, with an air of impassive melancholy, that Dr. Jasper liked to joke about sacred things; that the coil of error through which mortals had to wander offered many in-

soluble problems unless it were grasped in the right way.

In fact, the dinner went off very well ; some of the remarks had been quite profound ; — everybody had made some observation, even to Bertie Jasper. In short, Mrs. Reese was pleased with herself and with her guests, and at eight o'clock sailed majestically out of the room, saying that coffee would be ready in the library whenever they were in the mood for it. Mr. Reese confessed to himself that this was a happy stroke on her part. The Shakspeare Society would find her there, and, as mistress of the house, she could not easily be dislodged.

"I trust you will not mind," he whispered to Dr. Jasper, "if Mrs. Reese joins our meeting this evening. She has become very much interested in my researches of late, and says that she will bring out my notes on Hamlet, in tree-calf and vellum — so I could not argue with her, you know."

"Argue with her!" said Dr. Jasper. "Argue with a woman who gives us Roederer champagne and Tokay! I should think not. It would be worse than St. Peter arguing against the quality of the banquet let down from heaven by the four corners."

The Doctor filled his glass. "Let's drink her health. Let each man drink Mrs. Reese's health," he cried ; and it was drunk. "Let us drink everybody's health," the Doctor went on. "Hello, Redmond! I've a toast to propose : Here's to our sons and daughters."

"With all my heart," said Mr. Redmond. "Here's to our sons and our daughters!"

"You apparently mean, Mr. Redmond," remarked Mr. Brainerd, politely, "'your sons and my daughters,' since your children are daughters and his are sons."

"True," said Mr. Redmond, "true, I have no sons. But that lack," here he glanced at Bertie, "that lack is not irremediable."

"No, not irremediable," said Dr. Jasper. "Bertie, rouse yourself, sir; you're not drinking. I give it again, Here's to our sons and daughters. Drink to our sons and daughters."

"Mr. Redmond's sons," said Bertie. "With all my heart. I am sure Mr. Redmond's sons will be fine fellows,—the best sort of fellows. May they live long and prosper! And as to your daughters, father, that subject touches me deeply, intimately,—I drink to their welfare from my very heart of hearts. Edward,—where are you? See Edward! why the fellow's blushing!"

Edward Jasper was blushing, but rallied, and the joke went on. In fact, Mrs. Reese had to send word twice that coffee was waiting, before the party could be roused to a sense of their obligations; and, when they finally trooped, rather hilariously, into the library, she wore a countenance which struck awe into her husband's soul.

"We were drinking your health, Belinda," he remarked to her, apologetically. "Dr. Jasper proposed it."

"My health is very good," said Mrs. Reese, majestically; "but, certainly, it is not the result of Dr. Jasper's efforts that I am not a helpless cripple at this moment, carried around the house like an infant. I owe my present condition to the mind-cure; not to his skill, or his toasts."

Paul Forbes took his seat by the great lady, and endeavored to avert the rising storm. "They were also drinking the health of their 'sons and daughters,'" he remarked. "Naturally, the two young Jaspers, to say nothing of myself, could do no less than take the compliment as personal. We had no wish to balk our elders while they went on felicitating themselves on their brilliant good-fortune in having such fine fellows to come after them. As for me, I encouraged them to go on saying good things about us, for I wanted to be a son myself."

"I have one daughter and no son, as yet," said Mrs. Reese, impressively. "I hope some day to have a son, — a son after my own heart."

"He may astonish you," remarked Dr. Jasper. "'Oh, wonderful son that can so astonish a mother!' as Hamlet says. Now, in my family, it is never the mother who is astonished. It is the father who is struck all of a heap by the fantastic freaks of his offspring."

Mr. Brainerd put down his coffee-cup on the instant, and took up his Rolfe's edition of "Hamlet." "It is a little singular, Doctor," he said, "that you should have quoted from the very scene to which I

was about to call your attention. Perhaps you will all kindly take your books and turn to Act III., Scene 2. Rosencrantz says to the Prince, —

‘My lord, you once did love me.’

And the Prince replies, —

‘So I do still, by these pickers and stealers.’

Singular phrase that, ‘by these pickers and stealers.’”

“Very singular, indeed,” said Mr. Redmond. “Really remarkable! It would never have occurred to me to use such an expression.”

“He simply alludes to his fingers and thumbs,” suggested Dr. Chichester. “You know your catechism, Brainerd, — or ought to, at all events, — and that it is your duty to keep your hands from picking and stealing.”

“Yes, Dr. Chichester,” replied Mr. Brainerd, with a crushing air of superiority, tempered by the magnanimity of a great soul, “I know my catechism, and have taught it to many heathen at Sycamore Hill. I know, besides, what Shakspearian commentators say about this text I have indicated. But this society has proved, and proved successfully, that Shakspearian commentators are almost invariably wrong. Now, it seems to me that when Hamlet’s sometime playfellow tries to appeal to their old spirit of *camaraderie* by saying, ‘My lord, you once did love me,’ Hamlet would not have been likely to reply, ‘So I do still, by these hands,’ for that is the equivalent phrase for the commonly accepted mean-

ing. No, I am ready to vouch for it that what he actually said was, 'So I do still, *except for these pickers and stealers.*' That is except for his unnatural mother and his uncle, who have robbed him of his father and his throne, to say nothing of his comfort and peace of mind."

"That is very valuable, very," said Mr. Reese, making a note of it. "I shall adopt that, beyond a doubt. Pickers and stealers! Precisely. 'So I do still, *except for these thieves and murderers!*' Admirable!"

Mrs. Reese had her Shakspeare open at the right place, and was putting on her gold eyeglasses.

"But why did not Shakspeare say what he meant?" said she. "It does seem so foolish for a writer to give people all this trouble. I approve of calling a spade a spade."

"But then, Mrs. Reese," put in Mr. Brainerd, in his gentle, persuasive way, "you must reflect that Shakspeare wrote the play of 'Hamlet' in 1602 or 1603, and it has been doctored and tinkered by irreverent hands ever since. Editors and scholars have gone to work, feeling that the whole secret was easily within their grasp, and that they had only to fit their rusty little key in it, to open the whole treasure of meaning."

"See that we do nothing incautiously or fancifully," said Paul Forbes. "But I will just remark that I was once in Denmark, and it occurred to me to inquire whether there were any Danish proverb about 'While the grass grows'; and I was told that

'there was one, — 'While the grass grows the cow lies.' "

Mr. Reese was enamoured of this form of the proverb, — which was, beyond a doubt, the one to which a prince of Denmark would allude, instead of the old English — "Whylst grass doth growe oft starves the silly steede."

"Why!" he exclaimed, "think of the sensation my notes will make!"

"You might as well say *our* notes, Mr. Reese!" said his wife. "The publication will cost a good deal besides mere literary work, I assure you. Dr. Chichester, I hope in a few months to present each of you with a copy of our 'Notes on the Play of Hamlet.'"

"I shall feel much honored, — deeply honored," replied the Rector. "The book will contain, no doubt, some of my own suggestions; not, I hope, the most trivial and worthless."

"I want Henry Irving to have a copy of the book," said Edward Jasper, "and hope he will adopt it as his stage version."

Mrs. Reese was poring over the page, ambitious herself to make a point.

"What does it mean — 'Re-enter players with recorders?'" she demanded. "Flageolets? Why does it not *say* flageolets? The meaning begins to seem to me very obscure. It is a singular fact that I have read 'Hamlet' over and over, and seen it on the stage repeatedly, and it was as simple as possible to my perceptions. But now, studying it line by

line, there seems to be no clear idea anywhere. Now, this: 'Oh, the recorders! let me see one. To withdraw with you.' What does that mean—'to withdraw with you?'"

Mr. Reese put his head on one side, and looked at his wife with a mysterious smile. "That," said he, "is a vexed question. We need to be guarded in considering it, for we might make it mean too little, or, again, we might make it mean too much. It seems safest to take a medium course, and to decide that it means nothing in particular."

"Here comes in old Polonius," said Dr. Jasper. "Now, I often feel as if I were a regular old Polonius myself. In fact, which of us, unless he wants to be disagreeable, tells exactly what he thinks? Here I go to see my rich patients, and they tell me about their having heart-disease, nervous prostration, and the like, and I condole with them while they describe their ailments. 'Almost in shape like a camel!' 'By the mass,' say I, 'and 'tis like a camel, indeed,' or 'backed like a weasel,' or 'very like a whale!' You do it yourself, Dr. Chichester, —you do it every day of your life. And you young fellows will go on the same way with your wives, if you ever have them, — 'fool them to the top of their bent.'"

"I assure you, Dr. Jasper," said Mrs. Reese, "nothing of the sort goes on in this house. If I were to say a cloud was like a camel, Mr. Reese would declare it to be—to be—to be like something just the opposite. Nobody fools me to

the top of my bent. I have to be exact and sensible."

"I know you are exact and sensible always, dear madam," said Dr. Jasper, soothingly. "Just look here; how do you think it would do for Hamlet to say, when going to his mother, instead of 'I will speak daggers to her, but use none,' 'I will *look* daggers *at* her, but use none?'"

"I think that is far better," said Mrs. Reese, who was growing familiar and at ease in her new position, and began to experience besides the responsibilities the pleasures of censorship. "Nobody *speaks* daggers, but we all *look* daggers. That is a very weak ending to the scene, it seems to me, —

"'How in my words soever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent.'"

In fact, Mrs. Reese went on to propose that this couplet should be dropped altogether; it would be vastly to Shakspeare's credit to strike it out, since it contained neither beauty, nor reason, nor good English. There was no such word in the language as "shent," so far as she had ever heard, nor ought there to be. Mrs. Reese dropped her book and eyeglass at this point in her discourse, and went on to remark to the society that she was likely to be a valuable addition to their circle, in a critical way at least, because she possessed what was far better than any vagaries of genius for deciding vexed literary questions — that is, good-sense. And that she had good-sense she must thank the Lord for, since it

came by nature, and had grown with her growth and strengthened with her strength. This statement was enthusiastically applauded; then Dr. Chichester discovered that it was very late, and the party broke up.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SON AFTER HER OWN HEART.

It was not easy for Paul Forbes to find the requisite clearness of vision to settle all the questions which arose in his mind in these days. He felt that affairs were going ill with him: but somehow or other he must contrive a truce with destiny. He had simply made another mistake in life, and lost his chance of getting what was essential to his happiness and development. Marrying a fortune had had the same attraction for him that glass beads and bits of glass have for savages. He had piqued himself on the wit, assurance, and knowledge of the world which had shown him how to push his advantages to success. He had believed that what he pined for was leisure, and ease of mind. Brought face to face with the realities of life, he now learned that what he needed was a chance to work hard to make a home and win for his wife and children their daily bread. Love, which had hitherto been a pretty thing of fantasy and caprice, had at last disclosed to him what love can be to men: the shadow of a great rock in an arid land. What had touched him most deeply in poor little Polly's regard for him, was that he had for the first time a gift without value and without price. She had disclosed the

secret of happiness to him, but in return asked nothing. He would never see her again. Sweet thing! He wished now,—with all his heart he wished that, while he had held her in his arms that day in the woods when the shower came up, he had kissed her, just once. He had read of men, of Michael Angelo even, who nursed a similar regret to the last day of their lives, and he had smiled at such a weakness. He knew better now. He did not love Polly; it was Miriam whom he loved and to whom he was engaged. Still, he could not fix his thoughts on the girl he was to marry, without remembering with anguish and wrath how she had pushed him towards the other, disclosed the little foolish secret at the bottom of the maiden-heart, and tempted him with the cunning of the serpent.

Ten days went on before he again saw Miriam, who had been chiefly at the Rectory during Polly's illness. He had counted on seeing her the night of the "Shakspeare dinner," but she was not at home. He had been in New York for the past three days, and had come back with a definite purpose in his mind at last. A month before he had applied for a position, and he had now secured it. He felt urgently driven to confide everything to Miriam, whose wishes must be one of the most important factors in his plans. Hearing that she was to sleep at home that night, he walked over to the Chichesters to bring her back after the party broke up. Singular to relate, while he was crossing the grounds he heard her voice, and, drawing back into the shadow of the

shrubberies, he could distinctly see her pass, leaning on Edward Jasper's arm.

He felt self-convicted of negligence; he had not told her of his return from New York. Accordingly, he pencilled a little note, and left it for her in Peter's hands, telling her of his disappointment in not seeing her at dinner, and asking for an interview next day at eleven.

He found her sitting on a sofa in the little alcove parlor. She did not rise, but stretched out a languid hand, smiling.

"So you have come back!" she remarked.

"Yes, I have come back," Paul returned, "Congratulate me, Miriam: I have secured a very good position. I spoke to you about it, you will remember, as the only thing which seemed to offer me anything in my line. It is a sort of editorship, — that is, I am to be art editor of a magazine. I sent my credentials, and they telegraphed that they wanted a personal interview. Rather to my own surprise, they gave me the place at once, with a salary of eighteen hundred dollars a year."

He stood before her, looking down, and she looked up at him.

"Eighteen hundred dollars a year!" she repeated. "Is that as much as you expected?"

"Oh, yes. I have three hundred a year more, — perhaps you know, and a little money laid up. I am certain that I can easily earn enough to bring my income up to three thousand. In fact, I consider myself at last to have a footing in society, and I am

come,— what do you suppose I have come for, Miriam? — to ask you to marry me.”

She regarded him with the same half-smile.

“It has done you good,” she said. “You look freer, bolder.”

“A man feels free and bold when he may at last, after hesitations and delays, ask a woman to marry him,— not simply because he loves her and demands her love, but because he feels assured that he can take care of her, shelter her, feed her, clothe her. The thought has lain heavy on my heart all summer, Miriam, that, in spite of all my fine professions, I could do nothing for you. I am in good spirits today. Come, say you will marry me.”

“I am glad you are in good spirits,” she said, in a soft tantalizing way, which Paul knew.

“Why should I not be in good spirits? I have not seen you for ten days, and now I see you. Moreover, henceforth I intend to see you perpetually. Besides, my vanity was tickled in New York. I had no idea I was so much of a personage. Somebody said to me, ‘I take it for granted you are *the* Forbes? Certainly!’ I replied, ‘I am *the* Forbes,— the great Forbes I suppose you mean?’”

“So they offered the great Forbes eighteen hundred a year?”

“I dare say, rich, spoiled woman that you are, you look down on eighteen hundred a year, but to me it means independence, self-respect, a right to live. And it was a pleasure, too, to find out that my old patron Lecoq had written them that I was a man

to get hold of and get work out of. I had sighed a little to think how I had lavished my strength on anonymous, ephemeral work, which had not even gained me a reputation; that I had still to prove what was in me."

She looked at him silently, as if studying this new mood, which lent his whole person an indescribable force, an *élan* which gave him fresh youth. So far he had remained standing, but he now took a seat close beside her.

"Why do you look at me so?" he asked. "You seem to be gazing over me, through me, beyond me. There is a fantastic sort of charm about you to-day. I feel bewitched, under a spell. How splendid you are! How much did the gown cost that you have on? You seem to be a part of this cloth-of-gold tapestry. Perhaps you are thinking you will not have many such dresses out of my income—but who knows! . . . What is it? Your smile stirs me, but it alarms me. It is as if you knew something I did not suspect. . . . Come, now, answer me. I asked you to marry me. I want you to marry me at once."

"At once?"

"To-day, if you will." She dropped her eyes; her hands lay in her lap, and she locked them, and pressed their palms together.

"Yes, I want to begin in New York the first of October. I have finished your mother's catalogue. The summer is over; the voice of the turtle is no more heard in the land. It is a real autumnal day.

A bitter east wind blows ; and, as I walked across the lawn, the air was full of dead leaves, which went whirling about, and which I first mistook for a flock of sparrows. Afterwards I saw a flock of sparrows, and I mistook them for dead leaves. When such signs as these are seen, wise men take thought of the coming winter. I want to put my house in order,—in short, Miriam, I want my wife.”

Paul studied the face before him, and he was studied in turn by those restless, brilliant eyes.

“You promised to marry me long ago,” he went on. “Now you must let me speak to your mother. I shall speak to her to-day. I am no longer afraid to speak, since I no longer feel myself a needy adventurer.”

“You say you have actually accepted this place in New York.”

“I even signed the agreement.”

“Without a thought of me?”

“Without a thought of you? I might say thinking of you, and only of you. Frankly, Miriam, I wanted a basis on which to effect a change. It has all been very charming, making love to you, under the rose,—but I am not romantic enough to love unnecessary secrets. I feel as if my concessions to your wishes had been stretched as far as my self-respect will bear. I don’t like a man who talks about his self-respect, but I assure you I have had to think of mine. I have waked more than once out of a sound sleep at night tingling with mortification to remember the rôle you had appointed me. Now,

I can go to your mother, and ask her honestly for her consent that you should be my wife."

"You can support a wife on two thousand a year?"

"If she loves me well enough to give up luxury, — yes."

"You count on my mother's generosity."

"No, Miriam, I do not. You are her daughter, and what is between you and her I have no right to question, and no wish to control. But for myself, I intend, please God, to stand upright to the end of my life. I want no money I do not earn."

"Evidently," said Miriam, "you consider yourself bound to me."

She leaned back on the arm of the sofa, her hands folded on her lap, and gazed at him with a piercing, attentive look.

He looked back at her as fixedly and searchingly.

"I most certainly do," said he, dryly. "I am not a weather-cock."

"You consider yourself bound to me in honor, yet you make no pretension to loving me."

"Do I not? My love is a twice-told tale to your ears. You do not look as if you wished to hear it to-day. But let me recall times when you believed in me, — when you said you were perfectly happy with me. Why, dear, how do I come to understand all the little ways of love so well? I know every cunning little dimple of your hands, — the pink tips, the soft, warm palm. I could draw every line. And more, — though you were always shy of me, I have

kissed you, — I remember every kiss, each single one has left its meaning in my blood."

She still gazed at him steadily, biting her lips, which bore no trace of a smile.

"No," she said, with a strange violence, "you do not love me."

He gave her a haughty glance, started up, walked to the window, then came back.

"Prove your words," said he, standing before her as he had done in the earlier part of their interview.

"You did not love me the day you and Polly were in the woods together."

"You are right," said Paul. "I was angry and mortified. I hardly loved you then."

"When you came to the Rectory the morning Polly was ill, did you love me then?"

"No," answered Paul, quietly, "I did not love you then."

"But you loved Polly."

"I confess, Miriam, that I love Polly deeply and tenderly. If all my pity and sympathy had not been drawn towards her, I should be less than a man." He was stung by this endless iteration of that jealous taunt, and spoke with heat. Presently he went on more quietly. "There is love and love. I have given my faith to you, and you shall have it to the end. I regard that pretty child as something apart, — she is neither a claimant to dispute with you, nor a temptress for me to avoid."

"Yes; you can love Polly."

"Miriam, Miriam, life is too precious to be wasted

in disputes. You would seem to have a hundred lives to be able to throw away the worth of a single existence. How can you bear to bring back that thought perpetually, — to make me remember how you tortured that child for the gratification of your own — what shall I call it? Let it all go, — let the recollection of it slumber deep down out of sight. You wanted to test me, — you wanted to test Polly, and what you actually tested, was it not yourself?"

"Yes, I confess it," said Miriam. "I proved myself that day. I know what I am; you need not find words to draw my likeness, — but what I am, I am, and shall be to the end, I suppose. Leopards do not change their spots. And if I am to be loved, a man must love me as I am. And with all my sins upon my head, all my faults, all my mistakes, one man does love me."

Paul took a step nearer; he bent down towards her, deeply touched and gratified.

"No," she went on in haste, "it is not you. You tried to love me, but you have not loved me, and you do not love me. Perhaps even without Polly, it was impossible that I should have won your love. I see how hideous all my actions have been. I know how spoiled, how jealous, how wicked I am. Yet I hoped, I almost felt certain that —" Paul had thrown himself beside her, and had clasped her in his arms.

"Miriam," said he, gazing into her agitated face, his own features working — "Miriam, forgive me, — forgive me everything. Let us begin it all over again."

"Yes," she answered, in a choked voice; "we will begin it all over again. And you, — I don't ask you to forgive me, Paul, — but I know, I feel that, — you will forgive me."

Her eyes were streaming.

"Miriam," he said, "Miriam," — his whole heart was in his voice.

She uttered no word, but turned suddenly, and flung her arms about his neck; then, bending back a moment, she held his face between her hands, gazed at him steadily, at last kissed his forehead, his eyes, his lips. Her caress was so swift, so sweet, so full of passion, that for an instant Paul experienced only a startled surprise. Then all at once realizing that this woman, with this wondrous, excited, beautiful face, with those brilliant eager eyes, was Miriam, his wife that was to be — he bent his head over her and held her close.

She clung to him, answering his embrace. Suddenly she raised her head and listened. "There comes my mother!" she exclaimed, and sprang to her feet. "Stay here," she said, with an imperious gesture; "you can talk to her." She nodded to him twice, not smiling but with that wonderful radiance of expression still on her face, and ran out of the room.

Paul, left alone, paced about in excitement. He had been powerfully and sweetly moved, and a feeling of youth, strength, freedom, took possession of him, and became stronger every moment.

What had just passed put everything beyond

doubt in his mind. Miriam was his, — his by the closest ties of feeling, — and he was hers. What had happened had surpassed every experience of his life. There came over his whole spirit an indescribable peace. He awaited the great lady's approach with no fears or scruples. He heard her voice in the next room, addressing a servant, and, advancing to the hangings over the doorway, he raised them and disclosed himself.

"What, are you here, Mr. Forbes?" she asked, looking at him with eager curiosity. "Is Miriam with you?"

"She left me this moment," said Paul. He stood with the peculiar expression on his face a man wears when he is arranging his thoughts in his own mind to carry out a sudden resolution. "Perhaps you will not mind coming in here," he added, smiling, yet showing that he was a little disconcerted. "There is something I wish to say to you."

Mrs. Reese looked startled and curious, but abated no whit of her majesty, as she swept into the alcove parlor, standing in the centre, and watching Paul, as he carefully closed the doors and dropped the portières over them.

"What is it?" she demanded. "Miriam has just left you, you say, Mr. Forbes."

He went up to the great lady, took her hand, and pressed his lips to it.

"She has just left me," he said again, "and at this moment I feel bold enough to ask you, — to ask you, —" Mrs. Reese drew herself to her full height:

she not only felt the responsibilities of the rôle now assigned her, but she had studied its picturesque possibilities. "You can guess what my presumption is," he went on, with a half-laugh, — "it has lain close to my heart so long that I am frightened at the idea of bringing it out into the light. But I want your daughter, Mrs. Reese; I want her for my wife."

"Paul," cried Mrs. Reese, opening her arms, "Paul, my son!" She gathered him into her ample embrace. "Oh," she murmured, "I am so happy! I am as happy as a girl. I loved you from the very first moment. I wanted you for my son. I am an old woman. I may say what I please."

Paul, already carried a little out of himself, was profoundly touched by these cordial words.

"I am not much to have as a son," said he; "but, on my soul, I will try to be a good son. I reflect no honor upon you. I offer my wife no brilliant destiny. But I will be faithful to her and to you. You may trust me."

"Oh, I do trust you," said Mrs. Reese. "The look of your eyes — that smile! In all my life I never believed half so much in any one before; and whatever I have you shall have. Where I live you shall live; where I go you shall be perpetually with me."

Paul stepped back, as if, perhaps, to gain room to make his words the more effective.

"I wished also to explain," he remarked, with a certain deliberate emphasis, "that I am at last in a

position to provide for a wife. I have secured a sort of editorship in New York, an — ”

“An editorship? what is that?” demanded Mrs. Reese. “What editorship? What is it worth?”

“It is a position for which I am fairly well qualified,” said Paul. “It requires an artist, or, at least, a man with a fair amount of experience in art, to fulfil all its duties. And they give me eighteen hundred a year — ”

“Eighteen hundred a year! Nonsense!” said Mrs. Reese. “The idea is absurd! Eighteen hundred a year — why — ”

“I have three hundred a year, besides, from my father’s — ”

“Three hundred a year! Why, it is not worth talking about,” said Mrs. Reese. “You have no sort of an idea what my income is!”

“The eighteen hundred and the three hundred make more than two thousand,” pursued Paul, with growing energy, “and I think I can promise to make up the amount to three thousand by various undertakings which — ”

Mrs. Reese could not repress her impatience at these ignominious details. It actually cheapened the worth of her crowning triumph to hear such paltry sums mentioned. She made an imperious gesture.

“Oh, I assure you,” she exclaimed, “that sort of thing need not concern you at all. Actually, I do not care if you have not a dollar in your pocket. In fact, I should prefer that you had not. All I want

is to have you for my son-in-law. I will do the rest. There is nothing small, nothing mean, about me. You shall never have an expense—I will pay for everything. We will live where you please, and do whatever you like, and I will furnish the means.”

Paul took her hand, and led her to a seat.

“Sit down,” he said. “Certainly I am profoundly flattered; it would be strange if all my affection and gratitude were not stirred to their very depths by such generosity and such real kindness as you have invariably shown me. It is not that I am unappreciative, but simply that I am an individual human being, with my own ideas, my own necessities, my own requirements, when I say that—”

“Trust me to carry out your ideas, answer your necessities and your requirements,” said Mrs. Reese. “You shall have the freest use of all my things; you shall be troubled for nothing, have no responsibilities and no cares.” She sat, her face beaming with smiles, her whole person expanding under the influence of her animating ideas. “You will make me young again,” she pursued. “I feel all my old ambitions stirring. I have always needed somebody like you to teach me how to spend my money properly. Miriam will make a great success as your wife. I predict all sorts of things for her.”

“You do me great honor,” said Paul, quietly. “You expect too much of me, and in your more brilliant hopes you will be disappointed. But I promise you one thing: I will try with all my power to make Miriam happy. I will devote myself to that. Hith-

erto, in spite of all her chances, life has failed to give her just the — ”

“She needed you,” said Mrs. Reese, interrupting, with emphasis. “She needed you, and so did I. Now, she will use all her opportunities, show all her talents, and develop all her powers. We will live wherever you like; if you prefer Europe — ”

Paul made one more effort to secure a hearing for his own wishes and his own plans, then gave up the matter for the present, feeling that it was a waste of breath to attempt to contend with the great lady’s resolution and exuberance of joy. At the least mention of his own means, she put on so lofty a manner, she appeared so magnanimous and so disinterested, she intrenched herself so strongly in the dignity of her own wealth, she looked at him so kindly, and seemed so amazed at his want of alacrity in confirming her hopes of him, that he was again disconcerted and out of heart, and felt an intense relief when she said she must go and acquaint Mr. Reese with the good news. She left him to send Miriam to take her place, but word came that Miss Reese had gone out.

Paul thought it not unlikely that he should find her walking in the grounds, and he, too, left the house. The east wind still blew, but the clouds had broken, and the sun shone fitfully. He crossed the lawns, and took his way over the bridge to the woods. The vivid impression made upon his imagination by Miriam’s sweet and artless caresses had partly faded away while Mrs. Reese was talking to him; but now it returned again. He dismissed the

idea that he should be coerced and dominated by an imperious mother-in-law, and tried to fasten his thoughts upon the actual compensations married life would be likely to bring him. He knew that he would be obliged to give up much that had hitherto been a part of himself—prepossessions, instincts, old prejudices which had become beliefs, likings and dislikings—all the *débris* of a personal experience which collects in the mind, and is called sentiment by a man himself, and foolish fancies by other people. Marriage inevitably entails this sacrifice upon all mankind, and he would cheerfully make it and begin anew for Miriam's sake. If she really loved him (and he could no longer have any doubt of the depth and ardor of the feeling which bound her to him), they could be as happy as any one need wish. As to the logical value of Mrs. Reese's exactions, he and Miriam were likely to have one mind, and must determine for themselves what their actual duty in life was.

Thus pondering possible problems of the future, Paul approached the place where he had felt certain of finding Miriam. It was a chosen nook of hers, her favorite rendezvous. He was not mistaken; she was there, sitting in a rustic seat fixed between the trunks of two great oaks. Singular to relate, Edward Jasper was with her, and was engrossing her attention by such earnest talk that neither of the two perceived that any one was approaching. Paul was dumfounded at first; then he smiled and walked off in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THAT QUEEN ANNE HOUSE.

IT was such a new experience for Lorraine to feel that she ought to be always running away from something, to be protecting herself from something; to be compelled to remember that, if she were not on guard, she might be surprised, and forced to capitulate with or against her will, that she was looking forward with an intense feeling of relief to going to college the third week in September. That sanctuary gained, Bertie would better understand the inviolability of her contracts and of her obligations. The very fact that she was so soon definitely to settle any presumptuous claims of a lover made it easier for her to concede him a few final privileges.

Bertie, meanwhile, put in an effective stroke for himself whenever he could, but cunningly postponed any useless action until he should be ready to make his grand *coup*. His pride was concerned in conquering this rebellious little creature. With two fathers looking on, both ready to applaud his success, one helping, the other deriding, he could not afford to be beaten. Besides, he was in love; he could not support existence without this fierce, sweet little creature. Moreover, he was almost certain

that she liked him. Again and again he would have sworn that she liked him ; the difficulty was that she did not know the signs, and mistook her love for something quite different.

There were times, it is true, when Bertie had almost a mind to let Lorraine go to college, and discover what a fantastic and ludicrous remnant of an existence she had imposed upon herself, in place of that which he had to offer her. But he hardly ventured to run this risk ; and, as the date of her departure drew near, he determined that he must act, and act promptly, — not only promptly, but effectually.

Accordingly, one evening he walked into Mr. Redmond's house, and found Lorraine sitting alone in the library.

"Now," he said, shutting one door behind him, then crossing the room and closing the other, which communicated with the dining-room, — "now, I am glad to find you alone, Lorraine, for I came over to have a little sensible conversation with you."

Lorraine had risen with a startled air.

"You need not close the doors," she said. "Why, what will papa and the girls think ?"

"Think?" repeated Bertie, standing in front of her and looking down at her. "I do not care what anybody thinks. Do you?" Stooping, he seemed to be making an attempt to kiss the scarlet lips, but the caress fell on her guarding hand instead.

"Oh, Bertie," she said, "you shall not behave in that way."

"No, I will not. Forgive me. I will do nothing

more to vex you. In fact, I am not in the least in a sentimental mood. I came over to discuss a matter of business."

"A matter of business?"

"Yes, simply a matter of business. I know that you have an excellent head for that sort of thing. I want to ask your advice. Please come over, and sit beside me on that sofa."

"My advice? I am not sure I could give good advice."

"I care for nobody else's, at all events. Please come." He held out his hand and looked at her with so pleading an expression that she followed him across the room to the sofa. It was a small sofa, with a square pillow at each end. Lorraine braced herself firmly against one, while Bertie took the other. They were face to face.

"You see," he remarked, confidentially, "I cannot have this horrible uncertainty hanging over me any longer."

Lorraine experienced a singular timidity. Somehow in all her acquaintance with Bertie she seemed never to have been really alone with him before. What was this uncertainty he alluded to? She felt as if she might be committing herself to something dangerous.

"I thought you said it was a matter of business," she said, with some asperity.

"It is, — it is purely a matter of business." He edged a little nearer to her. "Don't you remember, Lorraine," he said, looking in her face, and speaking

like a wheedling little boy, — “don’t you remember I told you one day about those Queen Anne houses I liked?”

“Those Queen Anne houses!” echoed Lorraine, growing scarlet. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“I’ve taken one of them, — I signed the lease to-day,” said Bertie, dropping his eyes, and seeming to look nowhere in particular. “It will be finished and ready to live in the first of November.”

Lorraine sat mute; her color came and went.


“You see,” explained Bertie, in his deliberate, clear way, “I had to secure it, or I should have lost the chance of getting it at all. I wanted the corner one, you know; it has more land and a better view than the others. The sun shines into every room in it, from attic to basement. It is a most desirable house, — I wanted it, — I wanted it very much. Accordingly, I just secured it.”

He ventured to steal a glance at Lorraine.

“Don’t you think it was a good idea?” he asked, gently.

“I don’t know what you mean, — I don’t know in the least what you mean,” she returned, and he saw that she was trembling.

“I’ll tell you what I mean,” said Bertie. He had possessed himself of her hand; indeed, just so as to be ready to detain her if she tried to spring away, he was now slipping his arm around her. “If we could be married about the middle of October, then travel for a month, we could begin housekeeping there the middle of November.”



"Bertie! I never heard such nonsense! I do not like such jokes. You know very well that I am not going to marry you, — that I am to do something very different — that I am going to college."

She was pulsing in his clasp like a detained bird, whose very life seems to depend on freedom.

"Now, Lorraine," said Bertie, with decision, "I want you to listen to me. Will you listen to me quietly? Never mind my arm. It will not do you the least harm. I want it to be there for a minute. I am going to ask you a simple question! Will you answer it?"

She nodded; her lips were trembling so that she could not frame a word.

"Don't you feel sure that I love you?" he demanded.

She nodded again. "I wish you did not love me," she faltered, "but I cannot help thinking that you do."

"Do you actually wish that I did not love you? Would it make no void in your life if I cared nothing for you, — if we had never met? Is it a wholly indifferent matter to you that I love you, — love you, love you, — love you from head to foot, your hair, your eyes, your lips, your beautiful little hands. I love your ways, I love your whims, I love even your tempers. To live with you, to try to please you, to enjoy with you; — morning, noon, and night to turn to you and say, 'Is it well with you?' and to have you say, 'It is well,' — that is my idea of happiness, fixed and absolute. Why, dear, as I walked over

that house again to-day, I was thinking all the time, 'Lorraine will do this,' or, 'Lorraine will do that.' I stood in the dining-room, and it came over me like a flash exactly how you would look sitting there, giving me my breakfast, with the eastern sun lighting up your hair. Then there was the fireplace, and I decided just what kind of chairs we would sit in before the fire. Do you mean to tell me I am to have nothing better than these sweet tormenting dreams? Are my wishes nothing to you? Don't you care just a little about making me happy?"

She had dropped her eyes, but now flashed him a glimpse of them. "If you would only be sensible," said she, "if you would understand that it is impossible for me to marry, why, then, we could be such good friends."

"Friends!" said Bertie, in a tone of withering scorn, "friends!" And as if to dispel any such meagre and spiritless idea of the possibilities of their future, he drew her close into his arms.

"Bertie!" said Lorraine, indignantly; but, struggle as she might, she was held fast.

"Lorraine," he whispered in her ear, "confess that you are not unhappy at this moment. You do not dislike me. Why, dear child, if you did not love me a little, this would be, to you, a monstrous sacrilege. Can't you see, don't you see, that this *was to be*? I could not help myself, and you cannot help yourself. You may consider yourself the victim of destiny; but do you suppose that, when I came back from Europe in May, I had any idea or inten-

tion of this? Far from it. I thought that when I was forty or more I might marry; a wife was a provision for the distant future, while the present was to be filled up with adventures and experiences as various and as piquant as I could contrive to get hold of. The notion of settling down at my age would have seemed abjectly prosaic. But all at once everything in the wide world suddenly became dull and tame compared with the excitement of being with you. Where you were, things happened. Where you were not, there was a yawning void."

"I ought not to listen to you," said Lorraine, who had gradually struggled to attain some independence of movement; "I ought not to listen, for somehow you beguile me."

"It is not I that beguile you," answered Bertie. "It is the idea of that house. I want you just to go over there with me, to-morrow, Lorraine, and see if you could resist it. There is the most delightful little fireplace, all tiled around,—it would be like the "Thousand and One Nights" just to study the pictures on those tiles. And the fender is the prettiest shining brass affair; I thought to-day of your pretty little slippered feet on it"—

"Bertie, that is ridiculous."

"Not in the least ridiculous. For you might have been to town, you know, or come in from a walk, and your feet would be cold, and you would say, 'Bertie, I want my slippers.'"

"I will not listen to such nonsense," said Lorraine, moved to laughter, in spite of her resolution; "and,

besides, you know very well," — here she laid her cheek against Herbert's coat-sleeve, and looked up at him, — "it would more probably be, 'Lorraine, I want *my* slippers.'"

"I will tell you what it is now, — Lorraine, I want my little wife."

"But, then, you have no little wife."

"Unlucky fellow that I am, I know I have not. But I want one, I want one by the middle of October. Now, I want you just to reflect that I have leased that house. You see, Lorraine, there is no
● other way — you must consent."

"But it does seem so foolish, so inconsistent, so wicked even, to give up all I had expected to do, — simply for the sake of being happy like that."

"Happy? happy like that?" said Bertie, demurely.
"My little love! — my little love!"

Where were all Lorraine's principles, all her ambitions, all her arguments, at that moment?

CHAPTER XXX.

OTHELLO'S OCCUPATION GONE.

PAUL FORBES was up betimes the day after Mrs. Reese had taken him, as it were, under the shelter of her powerful protection; but he was not stirring early enough to be ready for a visitor before eight o'clock, and Edward Jasper, who knocked at his door at that hour, was compelled to wait for him to dress.

Paul detained him but a moment, then let him in. Edward entered with but a scant effort at polite salutation.

"I have come to tell you an incredible piece of news," said he, looking at Forbes with an air which seemed to express all the assurance which could result from his having made up his mind what to say, yet was combined with some dread of the effect of his words. "I was married last night!"

"Married!" ejaculated Paul. "Married to whom?"

"Miriam Reese is now my wife."

Paul gazed at him with stupefaction.

"Miriam and I were married last night, at nine o'clock," Edward repeated. "Mr. Brainerd performed the ceremony. I left my wife in town, at

the Bellevue, an hour ago. I wanted to break this to you myself. We start for the West this evening."

Paul had, so far, uttered no exclamation, and made no movement; but now he stepped back a little, and braced himself against the door. All the color left his face, his brows knitted, and his lips were set firmly together.

"Miriam Reese is your wife!" he said, in a low voice.

Edward advanced, and put his hand on the other's shoulder. "It hurts me," said he, "to have you take it so."

"How should I take it?" asked Paul; but he did not look at Edward, and scarcely seemed conscious of his own words.

"Let me tell you how 'it was,'" Edward burst forth. "I loved her all the time. For two years she has known that all she had to do was to put out her hand, and I was at her feet. For a while this summer, I thought that all was lost. . . . She seemed pleased with you;—you could give her more than I could begin to offer,—I saw it all. Then, of late,—but I dare say you would prefer that I should not talk about it. She has told me everything. Her conscience was smitten, and what she has felt has been that she obstructed other people's happiness. I don't pretend to judge anybody—to understand anybody. . . . I only know that I was glad enough to offer her a share of my own life. . . . Perhaps I have behaved badly; there seemed no open course.

Miriam wanted to get away at once. . . . I have nothing to be proud of. She was not happy,—she resolved to throw herself into the abyss—I am the abyss.”

But while Edward said this he showed elation, and was evidently at the flood-tide of excited and joyous emotion. It was clear that he had no regrets on his own account.

“You want my congratulations,” remarked Paul, in a mechanical, listless way. “Very well! accept my congratulations.”

He removed the hand which still rested on his shoulder, walked to the other side of the room, and sat down. His eyes constantly dropped to the floor. It seemed evident to the other that Forbes was thinking deeply about something, with a bitter conflict of feeling; Edward would have liked to get at the secret of this intense preoccupation of mind.

“Forbes, I wish you would speak,” said he. “This silence is painful to me.”

“I am sorry for that,” Paul answered. “I really have nothing to say except that if you want my congratulations you have my congratulations. Anything else seems superfluous.”

“But, under the circumstances, —”

“Under the circumstances,” said Paul, “that is, since at this hour yesterday I had the honor to consider myself engaged to Miss Reese, who is now your wife, — the most graceful act on my part is, apparently, to efface myself. Accordingly, I efface myself.”

"I don't feel satisfied," muttered Edward; "that is, I would rather have you knock me down, or rave at me, than to take it like this. The time was when a man in your position would have called me out—but I don't exactly see what good that would do."

"Nor I," said Paul. "I shall not call you out."

"Miriam feels a good deal on the subject of her mother's disappointment," Edward went on to remark. "But she is certain that you will help Mrs. Reese to feel as kindly about it all as possible. As for myself, I prefer to have married Miriam without her mother's consent. But of course a daughter has a different conviction on such a subject. If you see Mrs. Reese —"

"I expect to see no one," said Paul. "At this moment I have one single definite intention,—that is to leave Sycamore Hill as soon as possible." He rose as he spoke, and looked about the room, as if eager to begin his preparations.

"I will go," said Edward. "Forgive me for coming; that is, if I have tried you too much. I wanted you to know at once, and to know from me. I wish you would send a message to Miriam."

The blood rushed to Paul's face, made it crimson for a moment, then faded again, and left his features white and rigid.

"No, I have no message," said he abruptly; then added, hastily, "Yes, I will say a word. Tell her that I hope she will be happy. I hope she will be entirely happy."

Edward accepted this as a peace-offering, and took his leave on the instant.

Left alone, Paul locked his door, then began to pace his room with violence. He had at first experienced a torpor on hearing that Miriam had driven her blow home in this way; but now he was moved by gusts of passion; against whom, or against what, he could not at first have defined. He felt himself outraged; the sport, the humiliated victim of a woman's caprice. Her professed generosity was an insult; it aroused a feeling of strong resentment. All he could so far believe of Miriam was that she was simply cruel; she had wished to punish him, and she had punished him by putting all his actions in an ugly light; by making him seem selfish, mercenary, and double-faced in the past, by poisoning all his future peace. He could never again, so he told himself, be free from the insistent shame of the thought that he had tried to marry a rich girl, bent himself double by his compliance with her whims, then finally been rejected and derided, with all his professions of love thrown back in his face as worthless. When he recalled the impassioned caress Miriam had given him the day before, it now seemed an added cruelty; she had decreed that at the moment of parting he should have a glimpse into the innermost mystery of love, and realize what he had lost. He had lived on the thought of her look and her kisses ever since yesterday; he had felt himself to be really setting out in a new career, and, counting up the treasures of his lot, he had put first and fore-

most the remembrance of Miriam's wonderful, beautiful face, and the enchantment of that absolute abandonment to a moment of intense feeling. She had wanted to put a sting into his recollection of her; a sting which must rankle deeper even than his anger at her deceit and want of faith.

He tortured himself thus for hours, heaping bitterness upon bitterness, denying himself any glimpse even of a future possible compensation of his lot, and settling the hopelessness of his destiny as something absolute, irrevocable. The very fact that one outlet from this tumultuous angry tide of feeling was towards a haven which his imagination had more than once of late pictured as too supremely dear and sweet for him ever to attain, — made him all the more urgent to forbid the thought of any one save Miriam herself.

He was at the merey of all the sweet and bitter images which his recollections of the past four months could call up. He remembered Miriam's hard, cruel accusations; then her remorse, her contrition, her confessions of her own jealous fondness. He saw, or seemed to see, clearly, now, that he had never answered her logically or convincingly; he had himself offered her the fatal opportunity to impugn his motives and question his constancy. He started once at this tardy realization that he had imposed upon her this necessity of self-sacrifice, feeling that he must go to her, answer her, satisfy her. What had actually happened was not a fact, but an absurd possibility, which a word from him would prevent. He caught

up his hat, — then his arms fell helpless by his side. No, it was all over; his chance was gone; he had made his play, and it had turned against him. All that he had to do now was to get himself away from Sycamore Hill. It was something to be thankful for that, in this general bewilderment and confusion, he had one clear course before him. He stood still a moment, thought calmly about his position, then made his decision. He drew his two trunks out into the middle of the room, emptied them of their contents, then began to repack them carefully and systematically. He found himself, presently, in a collected frame of mind, and could reason more logically about the necessities of his position. He began to think how Miriam's act would affect others; how Mrs. Reese would bear it; in fact, with what arguments he could most safely approach her, and try to influence her to be reconciled to a marriage so far from her wishes or expectations. He began to be more than a little curious about the probable general course of events. The blow had stunned him at first, but he was reviving; his anger and remorse no longer completely overpowered him, and he felt the ability to go out, meet people, and be once more complete master of himself. He wanted to see Mrs. Reese. He experienced for the great lady, indeed, a profound sympathy. How she was to bear all this, he could scarcely conjecture. At four o'clock that day he rang at the door of her house, and inquired of Peter if he could see her.

Peter looked at him with something approaching relief, admitted him, and said, in a low voice:—

"She's pretty bad, sir. She been a-goin' on all day."

"When did she have the news?" Forbes asked, feeling as if he were no longer one of the actors, but an indifferent spectator of the drama.

"At breakfast time," Peter explained. "She had just looked at the paper, an' gave a shriek, an' cried to me, 'Go to Miss Miriam's room,—go this instant and see if she is there.' An' just then Dr. Jasper came in. Dr. Jasper had just heard it from Mr. Edward."

By this time Mr. Reese, hearing voices, came out of the library; he looked white and shrunken; the experience had evidently not been a joyful one to him. He held out his hand to Paul.

"I ventured to call," said Paul. "Perhaps you would rather not see me."

Mr. Reese shook his head, as if the subject were indifferent to him. "My wife is in the library," said he, and he ushered the visitor in. "Belinda," he faltered, "here is Mr. Forbes. May he come in?"

Mrs. Reese had by this time gone through every phase of emotion; she had been by turns fiercely angry, rebellious, revengeful, full of scorn and loathing, and self-pitiful; she had emerged from all these stormier agitations, and was now chiefly possessed by an intense curiosity. She wanted to know; she wanted to understand; she wanted to get at the root of things, and find out everybody's.

motive. At times during the day her heart had yearned over the idea of Paul Forbes; she had been ready to adopt him, disinherit her daughter, and make him her heir; he should live with them as their own son, she had told her husband; he should profit by Miriam's abominable deceit, and her absurd misalliance; then again she had been ready to cast out fire and flames at Paul, if he should appear, for allowing the thing to happen at all; it must have been his fault. But living through so many fluctuations of feeling, and making such wild and impotent appeals to the universe, and receiving no answer except the dead negation of silence, or Mr. Reese's hopeless nods and shakes of the head, she was at last thankful to anybody who would answer her questions. She had quarrelled with both Dr. and Mrs. Jasper, when they ventured to approach her on a common basis, and was ready to accuse them of helping Edward to run off with Miriam. Dr. Chichester she had silenced and sent away; in fact, the Doctor had little to say, and was glad to go back to his own little Polly, who, that day and many a day afterwards, needed all his thought and care. But here was Paul Forbes, and of all people in the world, save Miriam, he must be the best informed. She assailed him with every sort of question. What had he said to Miriam? What promises had passed between them? What had been understood, what implied? In what way were they bound, and in what way left free? When had he seen Miriam last? What had she said, thought,

looked, and done? What had he said, thought, looked, and done? What had been his state of mind? And when he said that he had considered their engagement settled, Mrs. Reese asked how, by any philosophy dreamt of in heaven or earth, a man could consider himself engaged to a girl who was to be married to another man within twelve hours?

"It is the most ridiculous, the most unheard-of, the most unsuitable, the most obnoxious, the most incomprehensible marriage!" insisted Mrs. Reese, storming about the library, posing by turns on the hearth-rug or against the window, frowning, gesticulating, raising her eyes to heaven, calling on all the powers of the universe to aid her in objurgating this luckless connection. "I always foretold it, I always declared to Miriam that the reason she was bent on staying here was that she liked *that man*. The idea of such a girl's marrying in that way! Mistress of five languages, armed and equipped at all points for the most brilliant success, and yet,—heavens and earth! And when she might have married you, Mr. Forbes,—you! I want to understand it; I never wish to see her again, but I should like to see her once, just to make her tell me what it all means!"

"They are at the Bellevue, in town," said Paul. "They will be there until nine o'clock this evening, when they start for the West."

"At the Bellevue? How did you know it?" Mrs. Reese demanded, and then, when she had dis-

covered the source of his superior information, she wished to extract from him a full account of his interview with Edward Jasper. Ah, ungrateful girl, to have married that man! King Lear knew very well what he was saying when he declared it sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child. She would never see Miriam again, under any circumstances; and yet, the fact that her child was within reach drew her like a powerful magnet. Where were they going? Out West? To a ranch? A ranch! Miriam, mistress of five languages, brought up to grace courts, whose dress-makers' bills alone covered an amount which would have supported whole families in comfort,—such a girl live on a ranch! Mrs. Reese found more and more to say; her eloquence grew swollen by fresh floods of thought; she longed to overwhelm the criminals themselves with her reproaches, her menaces, her invectives. She felt that existence could not be borne with all this bitter wrath pent up; it must find some outlet. She was, besides, moved by the realization of the state of the case, knowing that, if this single opportunity for seeing Miriam were allowed to slip, her chance was over. Twelve hours later, her daughter would be beyond her reach.

Both Mr. Reese and Paul Forbes humored her mood, and urged her to go to town at once. The carriage was ordered, and at six o'clock the father and mother set out. "She is our only child, Belinda," Mr. Reese had observed, repeatedly. "She is our only child. You might spend half a million

of dollars, and yet you could not buy us another child of our own."

"I know," said the great lady, with anguish of heart, "I know; but yet it did seem —"

She was getting into the carriage as she spoke, leaning heavily on Paul Forbes's arm, and she looked at him for a moment, with streaming eyes. "I never did get anything I wanted for my money," she added, with a half sob of pain and wrath; "never, never! I sometimes think I might have been happier as a poor woman, and I might have made Miriam happier."

She nodded to Paul; Mr. Reese took the seat beside her; the man closed the door, mounted the box beside the coachman, and the carriage drove off. Paul Forbes went back into the house, now all brilliantly lighted; the eyes of the very temple-lamps, in the vestibule, glowed and burned, as if it were a festival night. Yet, as he wandered about the rooms, it seemed to Paul as if something somewhere lay dead. Painful memories tormented him, and his feelings were like those of a man who stands beside a corpse, with the knowledge that all his remorse and all his tenderness are alike powerless to bring back light and life and compel a word of absolution. Nobody watched him or wondered at him, and he was free to loiter in the pleasant nooks and recall how Miriam had looked as she sat or stood, how she had spoken, and what strange meanings had lurked beneath her words. He said his farewell to the familiar rooms, to the pictures and statuary, the

carvings, bronzes, glass, and bric-à-brac,—all of which had been a part of his summer at Sycamore Hill. “‘Othello’s occupation’s gone,’” he said, remembering how he had sometimes experienced an anticipatory sense of coming into the pomp and circumstance of this kingdom. “Yes,” he said again, after he had left a message of farewell to Mrs. Reese with Peter, and gone out and stood on the grounds, looking back at the great house and up at the clock-tower, whose windows were being touched by an illumination from the rising moon, “‘Othello’s occupation’s gone.’”

The next morning he awoke in New York. He had made no adieux, but had stolen away under cover of night. While he sat in the car watching the landscape, as the midnight train whirled across New Jersey, and saw the moon shining over the harvested fields, his thought was that even so was his

“Summer’s green all girded up in sheaves.”

He told himself that everything was over. For some days a feeling of deep sadness remained with him, a great heaviness weighed upon him; for his was a mind which retained strong traces of what had once impressed it. But, at the same time, he felt strong and free, and at intervals experienced an almost exultant sensation of relief, as though some heavy burden had been lifted from him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT HEAVEN'S GATE.

"OH, wonderful sons that can so astonish a father!" had been the burden of Dr. Jasper's complaint of late. For, surprised as he had been at his offspring, since the time of their birth, never had they so surprised him as in their marriages. For Herbert's followed hard upon Edward's, and took place towards the end of October. The necessity of proving to her sisters that her engagement was not only logical and necessary, but an ultimate gain for everybody, had gone far to convince Lorraine that Bertie was right. It was with difficulty that Nora and Madeline could accept the idea that the love-affair was anything but a foolish fiction, which their arguments and theories could dissolve into thin air. Nora consulted her favorite spirits as to how the young girl should best be dissuaded from folly, and Madeline made every effort to effect a "mind-cure" in Lorraine's behalf. Sister Agnes could only pray for her. All these efforts were to no purpose, and Mr. Redmond, on his side, was glad to speed the young couple towards the Queen Anne house. Herbert insisted that his best friend should be his best man; accordingly, the next time that Paul Forbes

saw Polly Chichester, he was standing at the altar rails, in St. John's Church, and saw her walking alone down the aisle towards him. For Polly was Lorraine's maid of honor. His heart leaped up as he met her glance, and, in the twinkling of an eye, all his life — past, present, and future — was something different from what it had been before. Up to this moment he had said that he would not be coerced. He would not spoil Polly's life for her; he was not essential to her happiness, although fate, for a time, had seemed to be knotting the threads of their destinies together. The accident of their being thrown into each other's society by two thunder-showers ought not to be relentless and inexorable in its logic. He was too poor a man for Polly to marry, and he must be master of himself and forget her. But this simple bliss of seeing her again, and feeling the magic of her candid, childlike eyes, was more effective than all his arguments.

"I hope you are quite well again," he said to her, at a moment when they stood side by side. "You were ill when I went away."

Yes, she was entirely well, Polly answered, soberly. Then she asked him if Lorraine were not the prettiest bride he had ever seen in his life.

"The prettiest bride I have ever seen *yet*," Paul answered. "But, I confess, I can care for only one bride, and that is not Herbert's, nor another's, but my own." Having said so much, he smiled into the young girl's eyes. After this surrender to a sweet and imperious longing, he said to himself, come

poverty, come what might, Polly should be his wife. He would no longer dread what existence might have to offer; what he desired was to live.

Yet he went back to New York without a word more to her. After he left the marriage feast, he crossed the grounds of Mrs. Reese's place and walked through the russet and crimson woods. He wanted to think once more about Miriam, in these familiar places, and was startled to find how remote she and all connected with her had suddenly become. Mr. and Mrs. Reese had sailed for Europe the week before, and he had seen them in New York. In fact, Mrs. Reese had importuned him to accompany them, and be a solace to their lonely, thwarted, disappointed existence. Mrs. Reese had told him that Mrs. Edward Jasper made a pretence of complete satisfaction in her frontier life, and alluded to her husband as if he were the first person who had ever offered her an opportunity for enjoyment.

"But nobody can tell anything about Miriam," her mother had remarked. "When she gets tired of scouring the prairies on a mustang, she will suddenly discover that barbaric pleasures are not to her taste, and will come out to us in Paris."

Thinking over his acquaintance with Miriam to-day, Paul saw it all in a new light. He forgave her everything, even her want of faith. He could never have played the part she allotted to him: he had his own life to live.

He returned to his work in New York, and occasionally he wrote a letter to Polly. When Christmas

came, he sent her a little present, and attached to it the twenty-ninth sonnet:—

“ When, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf Heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur’d like him, like him with friends possess’d,
Desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, — and then my state
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven’s gate;
For thy sweet love remember’d such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.”

Having thus announced his love, Paul found himself driven by the most imperious haste, and within twenty-four hours followed his sonnet to St. John’s Rectory, where he found Polly, sitting at a little table in the parlor, sewing.

“I thank you so much for your present, Mr. Forbes,” she said. “I never saw anything so exquisite, and — the — the — ”

“The sonnet?” he suggested. “It was regarding the sonnet that I came. I knew that the Shakespeare Society was broken up, now that Mr. Reese was in Europe, so that they could not explain its mysteries, — it seemed to me it was perhaps my duty to — ”

“I am sure it is,” she said, demurely.

“Miss Chichester,” he went on, drawing his chair close to hers, “I wonder if you would mind marry-

ing me. Ever since I saw you walking towards me the day of that wedding, I have dreamed of it's all happening over again, — with a difference. The mere idea enchants me. Say it shall come to pass."

Polly had dropped her work, and was looking at him seriously.

"No," she said softly, "no, — you know we settled all that."

"Settled it? Oh, no, — we are going to settle it now." He laid his hand on hers as he spoke. "There is one thing I have never told you yet, — in fact, it is only lately that it has wholly governed me. I do not know when I began to love you, Polly; — but I love you now — I love you with all my heart. My only wish is to have you for my wife. That wish is so strong it helps me to forget how poor a match I am for you, how far below your deserts, I —" He had both her hands now, and they were face to face, — "I think we might manage to live — I have a little of my own," he went on, speaking with an agitation which was half laughter and half tears; "and you remember that mirror with cupids I once told you about — there is that, and, —"

Polly too was both laughing and crying.

"I ought not, — I am sure I ought not," she faltered, "I —"

"You ought to marry a richer man, — a stronger and a better man," declared Paul, "but you will not easily find one who —"

"Who has a mirror supported by cupids?" said Polly. "I know it. But, then, I have spoiled

your life for you already; had it not been for me — ”

“Had it not been for you?” repeated Paul. “Were it not for you, at this moment what should I be? What comfort should I have in life?”

“I dare say,” remarked Polly, “that you would get on without me very well, — and I — I can live without you — so, — ”

“If you could get on better without me,” said Paul, “why, dear, I love you so that I could even go away and leave you to your happiness. But if, — if you can feel, as I feel, that real strength, real heart-ease, real hope, lies in our never being separated: if you feel, as I feel, that to be poor together is better than to be rich apart, — that even to suffer hand in hand is more blessed than any outside bliss, — why, then, — then, Polly, look up and let me see my wife’s eyes.”

She looked up, she was smiling; and Paul kissed her.

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